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# From the European Coal and Steel Community to the Common Market Transcript

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## **From the European Coal and Steel Community to the Common Market**

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This is the second of a series of lectures on Britain's relationship with the Continent. In the first, I sketched the reasons why we have found it so difficult to discover a satisfactory relationship with Europe, and today, I want to talk about the early stages of European integration in the 1950s and why Britain remained aloof from them.

The American Secretary of State from 1949 to 1953, Dean Acheson, called his memoirs for the period "Present at the Creation", and that is a good title since these years were a formative period in world politics, particularly in Europe, in which new relationships were being formed which survived for many years.

In the immediate post-War years, the countries, including Britain, had a great deal of freedom of manoeuvre, and Britain perhaps had the most, owing to the great prestige which she enjoyed after the War, but after the 1950s, relationships became frozen and it proved very difficult to alter them, so I think the pattern of modern Europe was really set in these years. Now, one has to bear in mind Britain's position at the end of the War, which was quite different from what it is today. First, Britain, alone among the European powers, except for Russia, which was a part-European power, was a victor in the War. Second, Britain was the only one of the European combatants which had neither been ruled by a Fascist or Nazi Government, nor been occupied by Germany or Italy, and, as a result, Britain was the only one of the European powers whose institutions had remained intact during the War. The other countries had to start again. Most of them had to adopt new constitutions, and they also had to come to terms with the experience of Fascism, Nazism, and collaboration. To put the point more crudely, during the post-War years, young people on the Continent had to ask whether they had reason to be ashamed of what their parents or grandparents had done during the War, and no one in Britain had to ask that question. Thirdly, Britain was seen, together with America and the Soviet Union, as one of the three great powers in the world, super-powers, and in that role, had taken part in the great wartime conferences at Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam. So, Britain saw herself as being in a quite different position from the countries on the Continent – the psychology was quite different. You can sum it up by saying that, in Europe, people were profoundly aware of their weakness and of the need to avoid any further confrontation between France and Germany, another European civil war if you like, but the atmosphere in Britain was quite different and there was tremendous optimism and self-confidence, optimism and self-confidence that were gradually to decline in the post-War period.

Now, the left-wing Labour MP Tony Benn called his volume of memoirs dealing with the 1950s "Years of Hope", and I once asked him why he had given them that title because, after all, Labour had been in opposition during that period, and his reply was that one had to remember the atmosphere of confidence then. He said Britain had won the War, secured full employment after it, a National Health Service, and a welfare state. She had ensured collective security through the NATO alliance and through supporting America in Korea. Benn said, "There seemed almost nothing that Britain could not achieve if she set her mind to it."

That sense of confidence began to decline after the failed Suez expedition in 1956, and then declined further under the impact of economic difficulty. But the psychology of self-confidence was well-expressed by Attlee, who was Prime Minister in the post-War Labour Government, in a speech he gave many years later, his last public speech in fact, in 1967, to the Labour Party. It was a typically laconic, short Attlee speech about the Common Market. He said: "The Common Market, the so-called Common Market of six nations, know them all well. Very recently, this country spent a great deal of blood and treasure rescuing four of them from the other two." And then he sat down...!

You could put the point in another way, by a critic of British policy, Jean Monnet, one of the architects of the European Community, who always regretted that Britain had not been more involved. He said: "Britain had not been conquered or invaded. She felt no need to exorcise history." I think that is very true, and differentiates Britain from the countries of the Continent.

However, those who were in favour of European unity could draw comfort from the fact that they seemed to enjoy the support of the person many regarded as the greatest living Englishman, Winston Churchill, the leader of the Conservative Party, who, of course, in 1945, became leader of the opposition, because it was Churchill who led the call for a united Europe, and, indeed, some regard him as one of the founders of the movement for European unity.

Now, I think worth remembering that, in June 1940, in order to forestall a French surrender, Churchill had offered France indissoluble union with Britain, that they had both become one country, in what he called their "... common defence of justice and freedom against subjection to a system which reduces mankind to a life of robots and slaves." Britain and France would become permanently united, and Britain would share with France the full cost of the War. Now, that was generous, given the fact that obviously the damage in France was much

greater than in Britain. The French Prime Minister at the time, Reynaud, who was an Anglophile, later said, "This might have marked the beginning of a United States of Europe," but Reynaud was soon overthrown by Marshal Pétain and the French pursued for an armistice before the proposal really got off the ground.

Rather remarkably, in the middle of the War, Churchill reverted to the idea of a united Europe, and a few days after the Battle of El Alamein in 1942, he wrote to his Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, with his views on the post-War world. He said: "I must admit that thoughts rest primarily in Europe, the revival of the glory of Europe, the parent condition of the modern nations and of civilisation." He then went on to say: "Hard as it is to say now, I look forward to the United States of Europe, in which the barriers between the nations will be greatly minimised and unrestricted travel will be possible" – a remarkable vision in the middle of the War with Germany.

Then, after the War, he reverted to that theme in a speech in Zurich in 1946, speaking as leader of the opposition. He said: "When the Nazi power was broken, I asked myself what was the best advice I could give my fellow citizens in our ravaged and exhausted Continent. My counsel to Europe can be given in a single word: unite." He said there was a remedy which if it were "...generally and spontaneously adopted would, as if by a miracle, transform the whole scene and would, in a few years, make all Europe, or the greater part of it, as free and happy as Switzerland is today." This remedy, he said, was "...to re-create the European family, or as much of it as we can, and provide it with a structure under which it can dwell in peace, in safety and in freedom." He said, "We must build a kind of United States of Europe," and he then went on, "I am going to say something that will astonish you" – this was in 1946. "The first step in the re-creation of the European family must be a partnership between France and Germany. There can be no revival of Europe without a spiritually great France and a spiritually great Germany." That was remarkable, just over a year after the end of the War.

Now, that was not the first time that Churchill had advocated a united Europe. He would have first advocated it well before the War, in 1930, when he had said, "The conception of a United States of Europe is right. Every step taken to that end, which appeases the obsolete hatreds and vanished oppressions, which makes easier the traffic and reciprocal services of Europe, which encourages nations to lay aside their precautionary panoply is good in itself." But then, in words that prefigured his post-War policies, he added: "But we have our own dream and our own task. We are with Europe but not of it; we are linked but not combined."

Towards the end of the 1940s, he made speeches which seemed to suggest that Britain was in fact part of Europe and that Britain should be prepared to sacrifice her sovereignty in the European movement. In a speech at the Albert Hall, in May 1947, just a few months after his Zurich speech, he spoke of the idea of a united Europe in which "...our country will play a decisive part" and he argued that Britain and France should be the founder partners in this movement. He said, "If Europe united as to be a living force, Britain will have to play her full part as a member of the European family." And two years later, he said: "The French Foreign Minister, Monsieur Schuman, declared in the French Parliament this week that, without Britain, there can be no Europe. This is entirely true. But our friends on the Continent need have no misgivings. Britain is an integral part of Europe, and we mean to play our part in the revival of her prosperity and greatness." He said, "No time must be lost in discussing this question with the dominions and seeking to convince them that their interests, as well as ours, lie in a United Europe." Now, I think all that would get Churchill expelled from the Conservative Party if people knew what he had said – perhaps he will be posthumously expelled from the Conservative Party, not what most modern Conservatives believe.

So, people who favoured a united Europe in the late-1940s could look to Churchill in opposition for inspiration. But, of course, the Labour Party was in power and, as you have gathered from the Attlee quotation, they were not very sympathetic. This Government saw its task as that of helping the Continent to rediscover democracy, to recover economically, and the Labour Government also said it would assist Western Europe in its defence. From this point of view, Britain was a most cooperative partner in Europe. In 1948, she signed a treaty of alliance with France and Benelux, the Treaty of Brussels, which we would refuse to do before both World Wars. We would not have had a formal alliance with France – this is common defence. This was expanded in the NATO alliance of 1949, which was an explicit commitment to collective security, so that an attack on any one member of the alliance, which included most of the Western European powers, was to be understood as an attack on all, and every member was under the obligation to go to the aid of any country that was attacked. This, again, was a great contrast with policy before the Wars, when Britain had refused to enter into any Continental commitment.

Also in 1949, Britain played a leading part in the establishment of a Council of Europe, which was an inter-governmental organisation, composed of members of national governments and national parliaments, and which produced the European Convention of Human Rights which is now in our Human Rights Act. It is also fair to say, though it had nothing to do with the European Union, the European Convention of Human Rights was drawn up in large part by Conservative lawyers, like David Maxwell Fyfe, strongly supported by Churchill, who favoured unifying Europe in terms of the rule of law. So, again, Churchill was a good candidate for expulsion from the modern Conservative Party.

All of these organisations were inter-governmental. None of them involved power-sharing or merging sovereignty. At that time, Britain saw herself as much more than a European power. She was at the centre of three circles, it was said: one of them was Europe; but the others were as head of the Empire, which was being transformed by the Attlee Government into a multiracial Commonwealth; and the third was the Special

Relationship with the United States. The key to British power and influence, it was thought then, was to hold these three relationships in balance, to remain at the centre of all three and not cut loose from any of them, and any tilt in one of these directions might put the other relationships at risk and so weaken British power, and in particular, merging sovereignty with Europe would compromise, it was thought, the British position as head of the Commonwealth. So, Britain could not easily merge with a European orientation.

Back at home, the Attlee Government was building what it saw as a British road to socialism. This involved construction of a welfare state and the nationalisation of basic industries; abroad, it meant the multinational Commonwealth, symbolised by the independence of India in 1947 and her admission to the Commonwealth as a republic. Labour, I think, had a tremendous emotional involvement with India, whose independence it had long supported, and also with the older dominions such as Canada and Australia, based on their support in two World Wars, and of course many British people had, and still have, relatives living in those countries. That feeling of the Labour Party was well expressed by Attlee's successor as Labour leader, Hugh Gaitskell, in a speech to the Labour Party Conference in 1962, in which he opposed British entry into the Common Market. He said in that speech: "We at least shall not forget Gallipoli and Vimy Ridge." What he meant was there is tremendous emotional resonance of the Commonwealth, and if joining Europe meant jettisoning that, it should be resisted.

On the Continent, attitudes were quite different, of course, and the leadership of the European movement, in the early years, lay with France, which was determined not to repeat the mistakes of the post-First World War period by treating Germany as a pariah state. Instead, the French decided a better policy would be to integrate Germany into Europe, so preventing her from going to war again.

If I were to say that the 9th of May 1950 is the most important date in the post-War history of Western Europe and also the most important date in Britain's relationship with Western Europe, I suspect that most people in the audience would not have the faintest idea of what I meant. But I think it is so.

The 9th of May 1950 was the date of the Schuman declaration which gave rise to the first movement towards European unity, the European Coal and Steel Community, and that gave rise to the European Community or Common Market, and that gave rise to the European Union to which we now belong, perhaps as unwilling members.

Schuman was Robert Schuman, who was the Foreign Minister of France, but he had an unusual background. He was born in Luxembourg but spent much of his early life in Lorraine, which, before 1914 - he was born in 1886. Before the First World War, Lorraine was part of Germany - it had been annexed by Bismarck after the Franco-Prussian War of 1871. So, Schuman grew up as a German citizen and was conscripted into the German Army in 1914 but rejected on health grounds. Now, after the First World War, Alsace and Lorraine were returned to France, so he became a French citizen, and he played an honourable role in the French Resistance in the Second World War, and then became a leading figure in French politics, but I think always saw himself as a Franco-German.

The basis of the Schuman plan was a mixture of fear and of hope. The fear was that German industrial might, and particularly her strength in the production of coal and steel, would lead to further German rearmament and aggression, because coal and steel were both the keys to economic power but also the raw materials for a possible renewed policy of German aggression. But Schuman believed it had been a mistake to punish Germany so severely after World War I, and the hope was that peace was more likely to be secured by reconciliation - but how to achieve it?

Here, I quote from the Schuman declaration of 9th of May. He said: "The coming together of the nations of Europe requires the elimination of the age-old opposition of France and Germany. Any action taken must, in the first place, concern these two countries." Not Britain, you notice, these two countries. "With this aim in view, the French Government proposes that action be taken immediately on one limited but decisive point. It proposes that French and German production of coal and steel be placed under a common high authority whose decisions would be binding within the framework of an organisation open to the participation of the other countries of Europe." So, you see, the aim was to turn the production of coal and steel into weapons of peace and so alter the whole context of Franco-German antagonism.

There was a further aim than that, and this is the whole Continental conception of the European movement which we in Britain have found difficult to accommodate ourselves to. The first aim was economic, but the ultimate aim was political - no less than the unity of Europe. Schuman said this: "Europe will not be made all at once or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity. The pooling of coal and steel production should immediately provide for the setting up of common foundations for economic development, as a first step in the federation of Europe." In other words, the ultimate aim was a federation of Europe, and economics was a means to that ultimate aim.

Germany immediately accepted the Schuman Plan. That was not surprising because it had been discussed with Germany before it was announced. Schuman had consulted the German Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer. Now, Germany was then West Germany. It was not reunified until after the Berlin Wall collapsed in 1989, and the Eastern part of Germany was then under Communist rule. But the new Western part of German had become

the Federal Republic in 1949, and its first Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, was, like Schuman, a Christian Democrat, and his aim was to anchor West Germany firmly into the Western alliance, and so, naturally, he grabbed the opportunity offered by the Schuman Plan.

What Schuman proposed, as I said, is that the coal and steel production of France and Germany be placed under a common authority called the High Authority. Now, the High Authority was a transnational body. Its members were to be appointed by the member states, but they were not to represent the member states, they were to represent the common European interest. It is rather like the European Commission today: its members are appointed by the member state, but they do not represent the member states, they represent the interests of the European Union.

If, as Schuman hoped, a European federation was ultimately to be achieved, the plan must be open to all European democracies, and in the event, four other countries joined: the three Benelux countries, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, and also Italy, but Britain did not join.

One journalist asked Schuman, at the press conference launching his plan, was this not a leap into the unknown, and Schuman replied, "Yes, it is a leap into the unknown." Just ten years since the Germans had conquered Paris and five years almost to the day since the defeat of Nazi Germany, but the Schuman Plan would, in his own words, "...make war between France and Germany not only unthinkable but materially impossible because they would be in an embrace so close that neither could draw back far enough to hit the other." The Schuman Plan marks the birth of European unity. The High Authority came to be transformed into the European Commission of the European Community in 1957, and now the European Union.

The Coal and Steel Community, like the European Union, had a Council of Ministers and a Court of Justice to arbitrate and a Common Assembly, which is now the European Parliament. The Common Assembly was not originally directed elected but selected by members of the various national parliaments and it had only supervisory powers. Today of course, the European Parliament is directly elected – we will be voting, or not voting, as the case may be, next May in elections for that – and of course it has got much wider powers.

The 9th of May is now known on the Continent, though I think much celebrated here, it is known as Europe Day, and sometimes as Schuman Day. There was apparently a move by the Catholic Church to beautify Schuman, but apparently the Catholic Church demands evidence of a miracle before this can occur – but you may think the creation of the Coal and Steel Community and the Common Market is a miracle or not, I do not know, just a few years after the War.

Now, what was Britain's attitude to this momentous development? The first thing to say is it came as a bolt from the blue because the British, unlike the Germans, had not been consulted. This indicates something important I think, that for France, the relationship with Germany was coming to be more important than the relationship with Britain. The French asked for agreement in principle to the establishment of a supranational authority, the High Authority. They said we are not prepared for Britain, or any other country for that matter, to haggle over the principle of a High Authority – that has to be accepted before you enter into discussions. This, of course, caused great difficulties for the British Government because, if you look at the High Authority, if you look at the Commission for that matter, it is a supranational body, but is it democratic? Is it properly accountable? Here, you have appointed members, members appointed by national governments, making important political decisions about the coal and steel industries, which could include decisions which put people out of the work. The High Authority would be sovereign over those matters. Was there not a danger of rule by technocrats? This fear was well expressed by someone who was broadly pro-European, Harold Macmillan, the future Conservative Prime Minister, then in opposition. He said to the Council of Europe in 1950: "Fearing the weakness of democracy, men have often sought safety in technocrats. There is nothing new in this. But we have not overthrown the Divine Right of Kings to fall down before the Divine Right of Experts." In other words, these were people who would not be democratically accountable. It is a worry many people have, I think, about the European Union now, that if you look at figures like Van Rompuy or Barroso or Lady Ashton or others, they are not elected, so who are they accountable to? Are they accountable? Can they be removed if you do not like their policies? That was the British worry about the High Authority.

There were further worries felt by the Labour Government. After all, they had just nationalised the coal industry and were in the process of nationalising the steel industry. How could these nationalised industries be integrated with a European authority built up on the basis of private ownership? It seemed a contradiction after you have nationalised industries then to merge them with those of other countries.

Then there was the post-War belief in Keynesian economics, which, it was argued, required national control of your economy to prevent unemployment. You needed a counter-cyclical policy on the part of your Government, spending in a recession to avoid unemployment. But if you ceded control to the High Authority, it could insist on the closure of British mines or steelworks. This fear was expressed by Labour's Deputy Prime Minister, Herbert Morrison, rather pithily. He said, "It is no good, the Durham miners will not wear it!" Harold Macmillan, remembering the unemployment in his constituency, Stockton, between the Wars, put that view forward, slightly less pithily perhaps. He said, "One thing is certain, and we may as well face it: our people are not going to hand over to any supranational authority the right to close down our pits or steelworks. We will allow no

supranational authority to put large masses of our people out of work in Durham, in the Midlands, in South Wales, or in Scotland.”

Then there was the fear of what the Coal and Steel Community would lead to, as Schuman said, a European federation, and one diplomat said, “British participation,” he advised the Government, “is likely to involve us in Europe beyond the point of no return, whether the plan involves some form of immediate federation in Europe or whether it is the first step in the federation of Europe, as the French statement puts it.”

Another diplomat advised the Foreign Minister, “We shall have tipped the balance against the other two elements in our world situation, the Atlantic community and the Commonwealth. It is not for nothing that Mr Schuman’s original memorandums said in terms and repeatedly that his plan would be a step towards a federation of Europe. To contemplate, even in principle, an agreement to pool the British coal and steel industries with those of other West European countries and make their operations subject to the decisions of an independent European authority, which are binding on Her Majesty’s Government, would imply a readiness to accept a surrender of sovereignty in a matter of vital national interest, which could carry us well beyond that point.”

Then there was some scepticism about whether the scheme would actually get off the ground. Another diplomat advised the Foreign Secretary, “We should not get committed. The Franco-German talks would inevitably break down sooner or later, and we would then have the chance of coming in as *deus ex machina* with a solution of our own.” That view was again summed up pithily by the Defence Secretary, Emanuel Shinwell, who said, “Do not buy this pig while it is still in the poke!”

This may sound, in retrospect, absurd, but you have to remember that French politics at that time was highly volatile and unstable, with governments changing, on average, every nine months. Indeed, just two weeks after Schuman made his speech, the French Minister of Finance told the British Chancellor that he was rather sceptical of the whole plan, and he also said two former Foreign Ministers were also sceptical. The main opposition parties in France, the Communists and the Gaullists, were bitterly opposed, for different reasons. Moreover, you could not be sure that democracy in Germany so soon after the War was yet secure, and perhaps it was natural for the Government to think these are highly unstable countries – should we associate ourselves with them? As I said, there was a tremendous fear of the unknown, of what it was going to lead to, and Ernest Bevin, the Foreign Secretary, summed it up by saying, “If you open up that Pandora’s box, you never know what Trojan horses would jump out!”

On the 2nd of June 1950, the Cabinet declared that it rejected the Schuman Plan for Britain. It said: “Monsieur Schuman’s original memorandum said in terms that his plan would be a step towards the federation of Europe. It has been our settled policy hitherto that, in view of our world position and interests, we should not commit ourselves irrevocably to Europe, either in the political or in the economic sphere, unless we could measure the extent and effect of the commitment. This is, in effect, what we are now being asked to do.” So, the British rejected participation.

In 1950, one opposition backbencher making his maiden speech said that this was a grave mistake and that Britain should join in the discussions. His name was Edward Heath, who was to play a very large part in all these matters later on, though he had little importance at the time.

What about Winston Churchill, leader of the opposition? He too opposed the Labour Government’s decision not to take part in the discussions. He spoke in the House of Commons, in June 1950, and said, “The Conservative and Liberal Parties say, without hesitation, that we are prepared to consider, and if convinced, to accept, the abrogation of national sovereignty, provided we are satisfied with the conditions and the safeguards. The Conservative and Liberal Parties declare that national sovereignty is not inviolable and that it may be resolutely diminished for the sake of all the men, in all the lands, finding their way home together.”

Churchill was returned to office in October 1951 – he became Prime Minister for the second time. But his Government followed exactly the same policy as Labour in refusing to join the Coal and Steel Community. Critics of Churchill said that his commitment to European unity was largely rhetorical, designed primarily to embarrass the Labour Government, and that he had no more intention than the Labour Government of sacrificing British sovereignty in Europe. By the end of Churchill’s premiership, in 1955, Britain was in the position which it was so long to occupy, still does occupy no doubt, being outside the mainstream of European development, and these were the years that, for better or worse, determined the British stance towards Europe.

Now, one has to ask: was Churchill’s opposition in Government to a European orientation an opposition of principle or an opposition of circumstance? Edward Heath, who knew Churchill well but was of course highly biased, he said it was circumstance and says Churchill would have supported Britain in Europe when he realised that the Commonwealth could not be a real replacement for Empire, and that the Special Relationship with the United States was really one of a subordinate to a superior. In 1961, Churchill certainly supported Harold Macmillan’s application to join the European Community, though with the reservation that Commonwealth interests must be safeguarded. But I think the clue to Churchill’s position is this: that although he favoured a united Europe, he did not favour an integrationist or federal Europe, but a Europe of intergovernmental cooperation, and that was the same sort of Europe that Labour favoured.

Indeed, the Conservative pro-Europeans, so-called, like Churchill and Harold Macmillan said that Britain ought to participate in the discussions on the Schuman Plan, not to accept it but to transform it into something intergovernmental which would suit Britain's interests better. The difference between Churchill and the Labour Government lay not in the question of supra-nationality – they were both opposed to that; the difference was that Churchill said, if only we had participated in the discussion, we could have transformed the plans so that they would meet British interests.

It is fair to say, by the time the Conservatives returned to office in 1951, the treaty setting up the Coal and Steel Community had already been ratified and there was, by then, no real possibility of transforming it. But the interesting, but unanswerable, question is this: if Labour had joined in the discussions earlier, in 1950, could the plan have been transformed into something that Britain could accept? My own view, for what it is worth, is a rather sceptical one, for this reason, that I think it was much more important for the French to bring the German coal and steel industries under supranational control than to reach an agreement with Britain. But the point is arguable, and it seems to me that nothing would have been lost by Britain entering the discussions - we could have withdrawn if we found that we could not transform it to suit our own interests.

The Conservative Foreign Secretary in 1951, Anthony Eden, who had, in my view, a great instinctive flair for foreign policy matters, did not share the view of Churchill and Macmillan that the Schuman Plan could be transformed to suit British interests. He did not believe that the French would unravel the arrangements they had made just to suit British convenience, and indeed the Continental powers, and the French in particular, were worried that Britain might try and water down the plan – that was why they demanded acceptance in principle in the discussions. In his speech, Schuman had spoken of the European powers as sharing a common destiny, and the question to be asked at that time, and indeed now, is whether Britain feels that she shares that destiny – that is the key question about Britain's European involvement. But what seems to me clear, and answerable, is that no British Government could, in the circumstances of the time, have accepted the Schuman Plan as it stood, that the commitment to a federal Europe was a step much too far, and no doubt still is.

What we did, in the end, was to negotiate an Association Agreement with the Coal and Steel Community in December 1954. Those who belong to London clubs will know there is a category called “country membership”, where you are associated but do not pay the full subscription and you do not have all the obligations of the regular members. That was our position with the Coal and Steel Community, and perhaps also our position outside the Eurozone. Perhaps it is a position British Governments would like us to have with the European Union, have always wanted us to have, some of the benefits of “country membership” but not the full obligation.

The Association Agreement was the first of many such attempts to secure a special position without sacrificing too much: a free trade area rather than a common market; then special terms when we joined the European Community; then various negotiations of the terms; then Margaret Thatcher's battle to secure a rebate on the British budget contribution; then various opt-outs from the Maastricht and Lisbon Treaties; and now, of course, another renegotiation if the Conservatives win the Election, led by David Cameron. All that is pre-figured in the Association Agreement with the Coal and Steel Community, or, if you like, in Churchill's words, “We are in Europe, but not of Europe.”

Britain's refusal to join the Coal and Steel Community had, in my view, very, very profound consequences because it proved that Europe could integrate without British leadership. Previously, British prestige was so great, it was unthinkable to take any steps without her, and you may remember my quotation of Schuman in 1949 that “Without Britain, there can be no Europe,” words quoted by Churchill, and this seemed to give Britain a veto on developments towards European unity, but after the rejection of the Schuman Plan, that was no longer the case. The other countries could move ahead on their own. If Britain wanted to join, she could, but she would have to accept the rules; if she did not want to join, so be it, and others would move ahead without her. Jean Monnet told the Chancellor of the Exchequer in May 1950, “I hope with all my heart that you will join in this from the start, but if you do not, we shall go ahead without you, and I am sure that, because you are realists, you will adjust to the facts when you see that we have succeeded.” So, France and Germany would be the motors of European cooperation; they, and not Britain, would be the dominant powers in the new Europe. Britain would be outside, but would eventually seek to join, but seek to join as a supplicant asking for special favours, and that was the position that de Gaulle, Britain's great opponent, always rejected for France – he said you should never get your country into the position of asking, of being what he called a “demander”, that was asking for something.

Now, you can reach two alternative conclusions about this. The first conclusion is that it was a mistake for Britain to have lost the leadership of Europe, and the American Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, whom I have already quoted, said it was “the greatest mistake of the post-War period”. Or you can say this was the right decision because, if we had joined, we would have faced the same problems we actually faced when we joined the European Community in 1973, and you may take the view the whole European adventure was a mistake for Britain.

I once heard the historian A.J.P. Taylor say that Churchill twice saved Britain: once by strenuous action in 1940;

and once by inaction in 1951 when he refused to join the Coal and Steel Community. But if you take this view, you then have to explain why both parties, in the 1960s, the Conservatives under Harold Macmillan, and Labour under Harold Wilson, took the view that, despite having earlier opposed the Common Market, that Britain had to join, and even to accept terms which might not have been as favourable as those we could have negotiated had we been there at the outset.

After the Coal and Steel Community, there was a second, but failed, stage of European integration, the idea of a European army, a joint European army, the so-called European Defence Community, or EDC, sometimes known as the Pleven Plan, after another French leader, Prime Minister René Pleven. The Pleven Plan was a response to American pressure because, after the outbreak of the Korean War, the Americans said we need to strengthen our defences, particularly in Western Europe, and the Germans need to make some contribution – in other words, we need to accept German rearmament. The French, naturally, were rather worried about this, and they said that German rearmament would be more acceptable within a European context than a national context, and so they proposed that a European army replace national armies. The European Defence Community Treaty was signed in May 1952, and it provided for German rearmament, but within the framework of European cooperation, so the German Government would not have control of the German Army, but it would be responsible to the Defence Community as a whole.

The Labour Government, when the plan was first produced, said it would not join, but would help others to achieve it if that was what they wanted. Attlee said he was totally opposed but could not see why they should not make the attempt. But what about the Conservatives? The idea of a European army had first been suggested not by Pleven but by Winston Churchill, in a speech in August 1950 to the Council of Europe. He said: “We should make a gesture of practical and constructive guidance by declaring ourselves in favour of the immediate creation of a European army under a unified command and in which we should all bear a worthy and honourable part.” He said “all”. Did he mean Britain as part of the “all”? In Government, he rejected a European army, or at least British participation. He said it was a “sludgy amalgam”, and he said his proposal had been meant for them, not for us, though he had used the word “all”. He said: “We help, we dedicate, we play a part, but we are not merged and do not forfeit our insular or Commonwealth-wide character. I should resist any American pressure to treat Britain on the same footing as the European states, none of whom have the advantages of the Channel and who are consequently conquered.”

Even the so-called Conservative pro-Europeans were opposed. Harold Macmillan says in his memoirs the idea was nonsense. He said: “Those who had any knowledge of military problems of organisation and supply, as well as strategic and tactical control, realised that, quite apart from the difficulties of language, the morale of such a force would be low and it would be of little military value.” But unlike Attlee, Macmillan said he hoped the EDC Treaty would fail, for this reason, that it would, if it worked, it would lead in fact to a very strong Germany on the Continent. He wrote this in his memoirs: “I frankly hoped and believed that they would break down. If they were successful, it might be a short-term advantage, especially if it facilitated immediate German rearmament, but the long-term future would be grim indeed. There would be a European community from which we would be excluded and which would effectively control Europe.” That, of course, was the dilemma he faced when he became Prime Minister. “This was the historic struggle in which we have been engaged, first against Louis XIV, then against Napoleon, and twice in our lifetime against Germany. Germany was weak now, but in the long run, she would be stronger than France and so we might be bringing about, in twenty years’ time, that domination of Europe by Germany, to prevent which we have made such terrible sacrifices twice within a single generation. It should therefore be our hope that the Schuman Plan and, more important, the EDC, should fail.”

In March 1953, Macmillan asked the Cabinet, “Are we really sure we want to see a six-power federal Europe, with a common army, a common coal and steel industry, Schuman Plan, ending in a common currency and monetary policy?” which already had been thought about. “If such a federal state comes into being, will it, in the long run, be in our interest, whether as an island or an imperial power? Will not Germany ultimately control this state, and may we not have created the very situation in Europe to prevent which, in every century since the Elizabethan Age, we have fought long and bitter wars?” That was the dilemma Macmillan was to face as Prime Minister, and perhaps also the dilemma David Cameron faces in regard to the Eurozone Bloc, which, if it is successful in creating some sort of federal union, will create a powerful economic and political bloc from which Britain is excluded.

Macmillan’s answer in relation to the European Defence Community was rather like his answer to the Schuman Plan: try and transform it into something intergovernmental. He said: “The whole of Europe was waiting for a lead and they could not understand why it did not come from a new Administration led by Churchill, and this seems to me wishful thinking. The Conservatives saw the world with Britain at the very centre of it and everyone waiting for a lead from Britain.” I think, by the 1950s, that was no longer true.

But again, Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, did not share that view. He said: “There was a powerful move towards integration in Europe, and Britain, although she could not join it, should not seek to obstruct it, but to encourage it.” And that is David Cameron’s view about the Eurozone and greater federal union in the Eurozone – he said, if that is needed to keep the Eurozone Bloc stable, then it is in our interests.

But this, of course, is a fundamental change in British foreign policy because, previously, as Macmillan had



outlined, we favoured a balance of power on the Continent, with no single dominant bloc or power, but Eden said, "Fear of the Soviet Union has altered these things and we must encourage Western European integration, that the emergence of Russia as an overriding threat has altered all this." And they said that the European Defence Community was the best way to achieve German rearmament and strengthen the Western alliance against the Soviet Union. So, you may say Jean Monnet is one of the founders of European unity, but you also have to say that Joseph Stalin is the second...!

Britain's dilemma on which of these positions to take was resolved by the French National Assembly, which, in 1954, voted not to ratify the ECD Treaty. A mixture of Gaullists and Communists and Socialists voted it down. That was further proof to many in Britain of the unstable and volatile nature of French politics – they are not consistent from one moment to the next. Some said French rejection was due to the British failure to participate, but I doubt that.

Now, the Plevin Plan was replaced by yet another plan, this was a British plan, the Eden Plan, Anthony Eden, who, in 1954, established West European Union, an intergovernmental arrangement, and, for the first time, Britain committed herself to the security of the Continent by agreeing to the permanent stationing of British troops and a tactical air force on the Continent. So, again, we remained good Europeans in the sense of being in Europe and committed to European security, but we were not good Europeans in the sense of being part of Europe.

The failure of the European Defence Community showed that European unity could not proceed too rapidly, that immediate political union was utopian - Schuman had realised that - and so also was immediate defence union, the idea of a European army. You must go slowly, through concrete economic achievements. And the third attempt at integration did that: that was the creation of the Common Market, the European Community, under the Treaty of Rome in 1957.

In June 1955, the Foreign Ministers of the six members of the Coal and Steel Community met at Messina in Sicily and decided to set up an ad hoc committee to create a Common Market. Britain was again invited to join, and the British attitude towards this development was laid out in a report of an inter-ministerial committee at the time, which said: "On the whole, the establishment of a European Common Market would be bad for the United Kingdom, and, if possible, should be frustrated, but if it came into being with us outside, we should pay an increasing price commercially, though even this would not necessarily outweigh the political objections to joining." The committee used four arguments against, all familiar: first, it would weaken the relationship with the Commonwealth; second, a customs union with a common external tariff, which the Europeans were creating, would be contrary to the British idea of free trade in foodstuffs; third, it might lead to further integration, and ultimately to political federation, which it said was not acceptable to public opinion in this country; and, four, it would remove protection for British industry against foreign competition. So, the committee recommended to ministers that we should not enter the Common Market - "This would not represent any change of policy and would cause no surprise in Europe."

Nevertheless, Britain took up the stance which the Attlee Government rejected with the Schuman Plan, of taking part in the discussions and seeing if they could be transformed into something that Britain could live with. But instead of sending a minister, as the other countries did, she sent an official from the Board of Trade, who eventually withdrew from the discussions when it was clear that a supranational community was to be created. That, perhaps, was a test of the argument of Churchill and Macmillan that we could have transformed the Schuman Plan had we only joined in the discussions. We did not succeed in transforming the idea of the Common Market. In November 1955, it was announced Britain would not participate further in the discussions and the official withdrew.

Those who were later to prove pro-Europeans did not, at that time, suggest we should join the Common Market. In November 1956, Harold Macmillan, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, told the House of Commons: "I do not believe that this House would ever agree to our entering arrangements which, as a matter of principle, would prevent our treating the great range of imports from the Commonwealth at least as favourably as those from the European countries. So, this objection, even if there were no other, would be quite fatal to any proposal that the United Kingdom should seek to take part in a European Common Market by joining a customs' union."

Reginald Maudling, a later Chancellor, told the Commons in February 1959: "We must recognise that for us to sign the Treaty of Rome would be to accept as the ultimate goal political federation in Europe, including ourselves. That, as I have said, does not seem to me to be a proposition which at the moment commands the majority of support in the country." You may think that was an understatement.

Now, by contrast with the discussion on the Schuman Plan, the Common Market was hardly discussed in the country or in Parliament. It was taken for granted that we shouldn't join. The decision was taken by default because it was a reaffirmation of existing policy, the policy decided at the time of the Schuman Plan, that we wanted cooperation in Western Europe, but not the political consequences.

Shortly after Britain withdrew from the discussions on the Common Market, the Suez Crisis occurred, which led to a further divergence between British and French attitudes because, for Britain, the failure of the Suez

expedition brought the lesson that Britain needed to regenerate the Special Relationship with America, but the French drew a different lesson, and they drew a lesson which Konrad Adenauer, Germany's Chancellor, gave to them immediately after the failure. He said, "For Britain, France and Germany," Adenauer said, "there was only one way of playing a decisive role in the world: that is to unite Europe. We have no time to waste. Europe will be your revenge" – that is on America for frustrating it. Adenauer was very critical of the British attitude. Britain, he said, was "...like an old man who has lost all his property and does not realise it", perhaps a perceptive comment. But the French then said: we can't rely on the Americans – they will always let us down; we must integrate further with Europe. So, in addition to Joseph Stalin and Jean Monnet as founders of Europe, you may also say that a third one was Egypt's President Nasser at the time of Suez...

Now, of course, the failure to take part in the Coal and Steel Community made it much less likely that we would participate in this further stage of European integration, the Treaty of Rome, and we thought that the old Europe of independent, quarrelling, sovereign nation states would continue and it perhaps would not come to anything, but something novel was happening and perhaps we did not recognise it. Europe was congealing into a new shape and was not to change significantly for over 30 years, until the Berlin Wall collapsed in 1989. But even so, our relationship with European institutions has hardly altered since the 1950s. It has been uncertain, half-in, half-out, strongly opposed to federalism, but unable to suggest an alternative which commands real enthusiasm on the Continent, and that pattern was set, for better or worse, in the 1950s.

I think that all the arguments we hear today were first rehearsed in the 1950s, and really, there is nothing new to say, but nevertheless, I hope to find enough material somehow for the remaining four lectures...!

Professor Vernon Bogdanor, 2013