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THE BIRTH OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: US AND UK ROLES IN THE CREATION OF A UNIFIED EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

Bruce Carolan

I. INTRODUCTION

The European Union came into existence in 1992, as the result of the adoption of the Treaty on European Union. But the seeds of the European Union were sown many years earlier. The “birth” of the European Union as the world knows it today occurred with the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951. In this sense, the European Union arose from the ashes of World War II. “Less fertile terrain for the growth of the structures of international cooperation can scarcely be imagined.”¹ Konrad Adenauer, first Chancellor of Germany following the end of World War II, described the German city of Cologne in April 1945, shortly before the end of the war, as a “ghost city.”² According to Adenauer, “more than half the houses and public buildings were totally destroyed There was no gas, no water, no electric current, and no means of transport.”³ Such scenes of devastation were repeated across Europe.

Yet in 1951, six European nations, all historic enemies, entered into the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) Treaty. Under the ECSC Treaty, France, Germany, Italy and the Benelux countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) agreed to relinquish a measure of their national sovereignty to international institutions. These institutions could make binding decisions related to the operation of the coal and steel industries for the respective member countries. The economic, political and social integration of Europe did not end (or begin for that matter, as discussed below,) with the ECSC. In less than a

1. MARK GILBERT, *SURPASSING REALISM: THE POLITICS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION SINCE 1945*, at 15 (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2003).

2. *Id.* at 16.

3. *Id.*

decade, after some dramatic disappointments,⁴ these same six countries entered into the European Economic Community (EEC) Treaty. Through a series of Treaty amendments over the next 50 years, the European Economic Community has become the modern European Union (EU). The EU, now with 27 Member States, represents one of the deepest forms of political, social and economic integration among sovereign nations in history. Within a broader European context, the economic integration of Europe culminating in the European Union has contributed to a sustained period of peace in Europe, a region of the world previously plagued by frequent wars.⁵

It might be assumed that Britain participated actively in the “birth” of the European Union. Although Britain has always stood aloof from continental Europe, in the immediate post-war years, British prestige was very high.⁶ As other European nations fell, it had stood alone against Fascism and Nazi Germany. As early as September 19, 1946, Sir Winston Churchill, recently ousted as Prime Minister, gave his “Zurich speech” in which he stated, “We must build a kind of United States of Europe”⁷ This sentiment alone should have signalled British involvement in European integration efforts.

Surprisingly, Britain did not participate in negotiations leading to the ECSC. In fact, its influence over the course of European integration diminished as continental Europe moved forward towards European integration without British participation. According to Stuart Croft, “In January 1948, Britain was leading the movement towards a closer association of West European nations But by January 1949, Britain had apparently lost the leadership of Europe, and the British were widely regarded as being responsible for undermining the movement towards European unity.”⁸ What accounts for this change? And what was the role of the United States in the early steps towards formation of the modern European Union?

From the perspective of modern-day Europe, it can be argued that Britain miscalculated how best to protect its interests in the post-war period. In opposing continental European ideas about integration in general and the ECSC

4. These disappointments comprised the failure of a proposed European Defence Community and European Political Community.

5. While the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) undoubtedly has helped maintain peace in Europe, its primary function was to deter the threat of U.S.S.R. aggression. European integration has reduced the threat of war among the countries who participated in this integration.

6. Clemens A. Wurm, *The Making of the European Community – Aux Origines de la Communauté Européenne: Britain, Western Europe and European Integration 1945-57: The View from the Continent*, 6 EUR. REV. HIST. 235, 236 (1999).

7. ARNOLD J. ZURCHER, *THE STRUGGLE TO UNITE EUROPE 1940-1958*, at 21 (N. Y. Univ. Press 1958).

8. Stuart Croft, *British Policy Towards Western Europe, 1947-9: The Best of Possible Worlds?* 64 INT'L AFF. 617, 626 (1988).

in particular, Britain placed considerable emphasis on its “special relationship” with the United States. The irony is that its stance annoyed the United States, and damaged the special relationship that the U.K. held so dear. The U.S., by adopting a supportive but “hands off” attitude towards the Schuman Proposal, contributed more to the creation of the modern EU than did Britain. The latter observation is rarely made in contemporary historical accounts of the founding of the European Union.

II. EVENTS AFTER WORLD WAR II RELEVANT TO EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

The modern history of European integration commences with the end of the Second World War in Europe, in May 1945, with calls emanating from resistance fighters and governments in exile for an integrated Europe.⁹ Modern European integration, leading to the European Union, is generally agreed to have been born with the dramatic declaration of French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman of May 9, 1950. This declaration was largely the work of French senior civil servant Jean Monnet, who headed up the planning office responsible for French economic reconstruction. In his remarks to a press conference called for the occasion, Schuman proposed the creation of a European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The ECSC would pool the resources of the French and German coal and steel industries (the traditional industries of war), and place them under a supranational High Authority. Other European nations were invited to join.

It is impossible to list all of the significant events leading up to the announcement of the Schuman Plan. Churchill’s 1946 Zurich speech could be perceived as a strong British commitment to creating a federal, or supranational, Europe. On the other side of the Atlantic, on March 12, 1947, U.S. President Harry Truman, in an address to the joint houses of Congress, committed the American people to providing financial and other assistance “essential to economic stability and orderly political processes.”¹⁰ Perhaps more significantly, in June of 1947, in a Harvard University commencement address, Secretary of State George Marshall announced the financial aid package formally known as the European Recovery Plan (ERP) that came to bear his

9. DEREK W. URWIN, *THE COMMUNITY OF EUROPE: A HISTORY OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION SINCE 1945*, at 9 (A.J. Nicholls & Martin S. Alexander eds., Longman Group UK Lmted. 2d ed., 1995).

10. Harry S. Truman, President of the United States of America, Address before a Joint Session of Congress (Mar. 12, 1947) (transcript available at http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/trudoc.asp).

name, "The Marshall Plan."¹¹ These U.S. developments reflected American will to provide the necessary resources for promoting European integration.

The Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) was formed in the wake of the ERP. The OEEC grew out of an ad hoc meeting of European diplomats in Paris in 1947 to discuss administration of the Marshall Plan.¹² It had the potential for being the source of the development of a federal Europe. In May 1948, the Congress of Europe was held in the Hague. It called for a European Parliament.¹³ This ultimately led to the creation of the Council of Europe, headquartered in Strasbourg.

Allan M. Williams argues that there is no "inevitable causality" in the sequence of events described above.¹⁴ The trajectory of events, however, would have suggested that proposals for the creation of supranational institutions would have emanated either from the OEEC or the Council of Europe. In fact, participants in the creation of the OEEC and the Council of Europe had argued for these institutions to have greater supranational characteristics; one might have expected for a plan such as the ECSC Treaty to originate there. But the proposal to create the supranational ECSC instead originated "in the narrow confines of the French planning office."¹⁵ There was little or no advance notice to the U.K.¹⁶ (the United States received at least one day's advance notice of the Schuman plan, when Secretary of State Dean Acheson stopped in Paris on his way to a ministerial conference in London¹⁷). Where was Great Britain? How did Britain react to and support the proposed Schuman Plan and subsequent efforts at European integration? How did the U.S. react to the announcement?

III. UNITED KINGDOM ATTITUDES AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

Initially, Great Britain wanted to "assume an active role in the reconstruction of Europe . . ."¹⁸ However, the British were hobbled by the cost of administering their German occupation zone, as they had insisted on the zone

11. DESMOND DINAN, *EUROPE RECAST: A HISTORY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION* 25-26 (Lynne Rienner Pub., Inc. 2004).

12. ZURCHER, *supra* note 7, at 34.

13. See Jan Melissen & Bert Zeeman, *Britain and Western Europe, 1945-51: Opportunities Lost?*, 63 INT'L AFF. 81, 90 (1986-7).

14. ALLAN M. WILLIAMS, *THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY: THE CONTRADICTIONS OF INTEGRATION* 26 (Felix Driver & Neil Roberts eds., Blackwell Pub. 2d ed., 1994).

15. DINAN, *supra* note 11, at 5.

16. *Id.* at 39.

17. *Id.*

18. ROBERT H. LIESHOUT, *THE STRUGGLE FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF EUROPE: THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION* 39 (Edward Elgar 1999).

with the largest population.¹⁹ There were other impediments to the British playing a lead role. There were deep differences in French and British concerns and perceptions, which influenced thinking on the best means to progress European reconstruction. Britain was concerned with the strength of sterling and the battle against inflation; France was focused on industrial revitalization and supporting the agricultural sector.²⁰ There were also deep philosophical divisions between the U.K. and continental Europe on the form that European reconstruction should take. The French, backed by the U.S., favored a supra-national approach, characterized by international institutions with powers to bind nations. The British favored a more traditional, intergovernmental approach, characterized by ministerial meetings requiring consensus decision making.

The posturing of the French and British governments in the post-war period reflected their philosophical differences. The French, in the 1947 negotiations leading to the OEEC, pushed for the organization to possess supranational characteristics with an international secretariat that would serve as a vehicle for promoting closer European integration.²¹ The British resisted this suggestion, and in its final form the OEEC functioned in a traditional, intergovernmental manner, with an Executive Committee, chaired by the British, representing the real seat of power.²² To add insult to injury, the British appointed Sir Edmund Hall-Patch, “a Treasury official seconded to the [British] Foreign Office,” as first Chair of the OEEC Executive Committee, reflecting subjugation of the OEEC to the British Foreign Office.²³ The Americans had wanted appointments to the Executive Committee to be at ministerial level.²⁴

This difference in viewpoints is also reflected in the negotiations leading to the creation of the Council of Europe. Belgian Prime Minister Paul-Henri Spaak, America’s choice for chair of the Council of the OEEC, because of his supranational leanings, thought it a good time to push for a directly elected European Assembly within the context of the Congress of Europe.²⁵ He invited the European Movement to submit detailed plans, and it did.

U.K. sentiment remained resolutely opposed to any supranational institutions, and Labour Party British Prime Minister Clement Attlee opposed bringing forth the idea. The resulting “compromise,” embodied in the Treaty of Westminster signed on May 5, 1947, creating the Statute of the Council of

19. *Id.*

20. Wurm, *supra* note 6, at 238.

21. Croft, *supra* note 8, at 624-25 (In their arguments the French were acting as proxy for the U.S.).

22. *Id.*

23. *Id.* at 625 (addition to original).

24. *Id.*

25. ZURCHER, *supra* note 7, at 37.

Europe, was a bicameral body, but with an Assembly largely devoid of any real power. The Consultative Assembly, as finally constituted, could not even set its own agenda; the members of the Council of Ministers, which functioned in a traditional intergovernmental manner, had to approve the Assembly's proposed agenda.²⁶

European leaders such as German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and Paul-Henri Spaak came to view Britain as aloof and remote from Continental European concerns. According to Wurm, "Adenauer remarked that Britain 'feels itself to be a neighbour of Europe rather than a European nation.'"²⁷

IV. U.S. ATTITUDES AND CONTRIBUTIONS TO EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

The United States was largely absent from efforts to rebuild Europe after the end of the First World War. The situation differed after the Second World War. Part of the reason for U.S. involvement in post-WWII reconstruction efforts was the developing "cold war" and the desire to stem Soviet power and influence in Western Europe. The U.S. sought "an economically buoyant" Europe as a bulwark against communism.²⁸ It had a vision of "an international economic system conducive to free trade and unfettered investment."²⁹

Britain lacked the resources to drive European-wide recovery. The U.S., fearful that poverty and misery helped spread communism, took a more active role. First, the Truman Doctrine pledged support to defend democracy when it was threatened. Second, the Marshall Plan pledged economic support to rebuild Europe. However, the United States did not wish merely to respond to a "wish list" of monetary demands from European countries. "The United States offered to provide Europe with money and goods, but only if the Europeans themselves came up with a plan for using the aid, and only if the plan was designed as a joint effort rather than a hodgepodge of national requests."³⁰

Furthermore, the U.S. wanted the Europeans to adopt a federal structure as a condition of receiving Marshall Plan aid. The U.S. provided a list of essential features to Western European governments including free trade, customs union, and the reduction of social welfare.³¹ The OEEC was created to help administer U.S. aid but, contrary to U.S. wishes, the organization was and remained predominantly intergovernmental in nature.

26. *Id.* at 45.

27. Wurm, *supra* note 6, at 240.

28. DINAN, *supra* note 11, at 20.

29. *Id.* at 15.

30. JOHN VAN OUDENAREN, *UNITING EUROPE: EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND THE POST-COLD WAR WORLD 3* (Ronald Tiersky ed., Rowan & Littlefield Pub., Inc. 2000).

31. GILBERT, *supra* note 1, at 22-23.

In addition, the U.S. pressured France to come up with a supranational solution to the German problem. In October 1949, then Secretary of State Dean Acheson met in Washington, D.C. with “the more important American Ambassadors in Western Europe,” and pressed for French action towards European integration.³² He gave them a letter specifying what he wanted them to do. “I have in mind,” he wrote, “a timetable for the creation of supra-national institutions, operating on a less than unanimity basis for dealing with specific, economic, social and perhaps other problems.”³³

According to historian Desmond Dinan, “[w]hat the Americans really wanted was what eventually happened in Europe not in 1952 but in 1992: a single market involving the free movement of goods, services and capital.”³⁴ What the U.S. suggested was the type of strong federal system usually termed supranationalism. “To locate deep and abiding enthusiasm for the supranational principle, one must turn to the United States,” according to British historian John Gillingham.³⁵

Eventually, France faced a deadline from the U.S. A meeting of Allied Foreign Ministers was scheduled for London in May 1950. Secretary of State Acheson gave Robert Schuman, his French counterpart, a deadline of May 1950 to devise a plan.³⁶ By this time, it was clear that the U.K. could not be relied upon to formulate a plan acceptable to the United States. They had been successful in limiting the supranational aspirations of both the OEEC and the Council of Europe, and had slowed the continental European movement towards deeper integration. Ironically, it may have been the signing of the NATO Treaty—representing a type of intergovernmental cooperation favoured by the British—which created the policy space for continental Europe to move forward without Britain. With the U.S. firmly committed to the defence of Western Europe from Soviet aggression, the U.K. became less important from a military point of view and, accordingly, less necessary to European integration plans. Thus, on May 9, 1950, on the deadline imposed by Secretary of State Dean Acheson, Robert Schuman made his announcement. Britain was reported to have received no prior notice of the announcement, “because of Schuman’s concern that London would again obstruct a major European initiative.”³⁷

32. ALAN S. MILWARD, *THE RECONSTRUCTION OF WESTERN EUROPE 1945-51*, at 391 (Univ. Cal. Press 1984).

33. *Id.*

34. DINAN, *supra* note 11, at 26.

35. JOHN GILLINGHAM, *EUROPEAN INTEGRATION, 1950-2003: SUPERSTATE OR NEW MARKET ECONOMY?* 27 (Cambridge Univ. Press 2003).

36. DINAN, *supra* note 11, at 35.

37. *Id.* at 39.

V. THE SCHUMAN PLAN AND ITS AFTERMATH

On January 24, 1950, a meeting of high-ranking U.S. officials concerned with European reconstruction was held in Washington, D.C.³⁸ The meeting contains hints of the growing friction between the U.S. and Britain over European economic recovery.³⁹ Averell Harriman, the U.S. special representative to Europe, expressed “the opinion that the British have violated their commitments under the Marshall plan through lack of cooperation economically with the European Continental countries”⁴⁰ The minutes contain the ominous and prescient comments:

Mr. Bohlen [Minister, Embassy Paris] said that ever since the war we have been putting every pressure on the French to do something or other and very little on the British, and that the historic feeling of fraternal association with the British, enhanced by our wartime partnership, has led to an assumption on the part of this government of the basic correctness of British positions without subjecting those positions to critical examination.⁴¹

On May 9, 1950, at 1 p.m.—just a few hours before Schuman’s historic announcement—a telegram was sent by the Secretary of State Dean Acheson, on his way to London for a meeting of Allied foreign ministers, to the Acting Secretary of State John Foster Dulles: “I believe it possible that tomorrow, or soon afterward, French Government may propose important approaches toward Germany in economic field.”⁴² He recognised, “the proposal, if made, may have very considerable possibilities. It may be very controversial.”⁴³ Later that same day, Acheson sent another telegram stating that he had just learned that the French cabinet had approved the proposal that morning and that Robert Schuman would be making an announcement that afternoon.⁴⁴ The text of the French statement followed the same day. The following morning, Acheson sent a telegram stating, in what would turn out to be an understatement, “British reaction has not yet developed but believe it is apt to be somewhat cautious.”⁴⁵ The afternoon of May 10, 1950, John Foster Dulles—soon to be Secretary of State under President Eisenhower—telegrammed Acheson in London that “it is my initial impression that the conception is brilliantly creative and could go far

38. U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT, FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES 1950, VOLUME III, WESTERN EUROPE 617 (S. Everett Gleason et al. eds., 1977) [hereinafter U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT].

39. Croft, *supra* note 8, at 625.

40. U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT, *supra* note 38, at 618.

41. *Id.* at 620 (addition to original).

42. *Id.* at 691-92.

43. *Id.* at 692.

44. *Id.*

45. *Id.* at 695.

to solve the most dangerous problem of our time, namely the relationship of Germany's industrial power to France and the West."⁴⁶ This enthusiasm was characteristic of U.S. attitudes to the Schuman Plan.

The British did not share U.S. excitement for the plan. A telegram from Mr. Ernest Bevin, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to the British Ambassador to France, Sir O. Harvey, dated May 9, 1950, reveals a visit to Mr. Bevin that day from the French Ambassador to Britain, M.R. Massigli. The French Ambassador brought with him "an urgent message from M. Schuman, regarding a decision which was taken by the French cabinet this morning."⁴⁷ The telegram contained considerable detail about the Schuman plan. It is noticeably lacking in enthusiasm.

The minutes of the Third Bipartite Ministerial Meeting in London on May 10, 1950, contain evidence of Britain's misgivings about French efforts to deepen European integration.⁴⁸ Mr. Bevin's comments reveal a British tendency to oppose issues by arguing against raising them for discussion. The minutes reveal that Mr. Bevin contended, "[t]he question of what body should be charged with the general direction of the Western effort might well be left alone for the time being [I]t was premature to take decisions of this kind at the present juncture."⁴⁹

The Third Bipartite was overshadowed by the Schuman proposal. The weeks following this announcement reveal the differing attitudes of the British and American governments. While the U.S. government wanted to preserve its ultimate options – particularly if the ECSC came to be seen as a cartel that might damage U.S. interests – it is clear that the government view generally favoured the French efforts. U.S. Special Representative to Europe Harriman wrote to Dean Acheson on May 20, 1950: "Believe proposal may well prove most important step towards economic progress and peace of Europe since original Marshall speech on ERP."⁵⁰

46. U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT, *supra* note 38, at 695.

47. DOCUMENTS ON BRITISH POLICY OVERSEAS SERIES II, VOLUME I: THE SCHUMAN PLAN, THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE AND WESTERN EUROPEAN INTEGRATION, MAY 1950- DECEMBER 1952, at 1 (Roger Bullen & M.E. Pelly eds., 1986) [hereinafter DOCUMENTS ON BRITISH POLICY]. If the dates on the respective U.S. and British telegrams are accurate, it appears that the U.K. did receive advance notice – albeit very brief notice – of Schuman's announcement. In his telegram to Dulles on May 10, 1950, after the full significance of Schuman's announcement apparently had sunk in, Acheson revealed that Jean Monnet had discussed the plan in some detail "on the night before the announcement", i.e., May 8, 1950. Thus, there is evidence that U.S. representatives were "tipped off" before their British counterparts. U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT, *supra* note 38, at 694-95.

48. See DOCUMENTS ON BRITISH POLICY, *supra* note 47, at 7-13.

49. *Id.* at 8-9.

50. U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT, *supra* note 38, at 702.

Britain, in the meantime, continued with its tactics of delay. After the announcement of the Schuman plan, with its implicit invitation to other countries such as Italy to join in the discussions, British Secretary of State Bevin on May 25 wrote to London's Ambassador in Paris, "I feel that the important thing is to get something started soon."⁵¹ What he proposed, however, would have slowed the process. He rejected French calls for an international conference to progress the proposal saying, "[a] full scale international conference . . . seems to me an inappropriate way of handling this affair in the next stage."⁵² He initially suggested negotiations about discussions between France and Germany alone. He was forced to withdraw this suggestion when informed that other governments already had been invited to participate.⁵³

Despite the effort to delay proceedings, events moved swiftly, prejudicing the British approach of seeking delay. In short order, the French government, anxious to issue a communiqué announcing the start of negotiations, issued an ultimatum to the British. On June 1, the British Ambassador to France reported to his Government. He wrote that the French had given Britain until 8 p.m. the following day to agree the language of a communiqué to the effect that the conference would have as its "immediate aim" the setting up of a supranational authority to govern coal and steel production of the participating nations (the language had been changed from stating that the participating countries had "decided" to set up such an authority).⁵⁴ On June 2, 1950, the British government refused this request, essentially excluding Britain from the subsequent negotiations.⁵⁵

The U.S. government saw this coming. The U.S. Ambassador to France, David Bruce, wrote to Dean Acheson on May 31, 1950, "that the British Government will not join in the declaration as now drafted. . . . [T]he French will issue the declaration as now drafted and signed by whatever continental countries may join, regardless of the British attitude."⁵⁶ On June 2, in the hours before the British refusal, Acheson wrote to U.S. Diplomatic Officers in various cities, including London, Paris, and Moscow, that "US welcomes Schuman proposal as imaginative and constructive initiative in field of Eur economic and political relations."⁵⁷

51. DOCUMENTS ON BRITISH POLICY, *supra* note 47, at 89.

52. *Id.*

53. *Id.* at 99.

54. *Id.* at 129.

55. *Id.* at 135-36.

56. U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT, *supra* note 38, at 711.

57. *Id.* at 714.

On June 4, 1950, Ambassador Bruce wrote to Acheson. His comments reflect the damage to U.S./U.K. relations from the British attitude to the Schuman proposal:

It is regrettable that [the] UK did not see its way clear to endorse [this] scheme at this time by accepting [the] chief principle involved namely [the] creation of [a] supranational authority to direct coal and steel pooling arrangement.

....

One cannot predict how the policy of the British Government may now unfold in this particular. . . . It is said that its Commonwealth obligations make it impossible to adhere as a full partner just as it had been unwilling for the same reason to join unreservedly in the operations of the OEEC.

....

There are other explanations of the UK attitude all of which probably had some bearing on its action. Perhaps the most important point . . . is the traditional foreign policy of the UK still tenaciously if somewhat covertly cherished despite debilitating wars and diminution of Empire, that assesses European politics in terms of balance of power.⁵⁸

A similar hint of annoyance is evident in communications from the U.S. Ambassador to London to Acheson on June 5, 1950. Referring to the recent British ploy of issuing a public call for “talks about talks” after knowing this had been rejected by the French, he wrote:

Why did the British undertake to challenge French leadership? On the one hand they were not prepared to join in the Schuman proposal, and on the other, they were not prepared to pay the consequences for not joining. The only way in which they could escape from either horn of this dilemma was to frustrate the whole project or to recast it according to their own liking. They believe . . . that a ministerial meeting to discuss either procedure or substance would probably produce precisely this effect.

I believe that our missions in Europe should be authorized, if this is necessary, discreetly and wisely to support French leadership in this matter.

....

58. *Id.* at 715-16 (addition to original).

The British may have some good reasons for not participating in the negotiations. Some of the reasons they have advanced are, however, I think no more than excuses.⁵⁹

Thus, the British had mishandled a key moment in the history of European integration. British reluctance to participate as a full partner continued with its refusal to participate in the Messina conference chaired by Paul-Henri Spaak, which eventually led to the creation—again without U.K. participation—of the European Economic Community in the Treaty of Rome of 1957. The British sought to establish a competing organisation, the European Free Trade Area, but its members' rates of economic growth failed to keep pace with those members of the European Economic Community. Finally, in 1961, the U.K. formally applied for membership in the EEC. However, France opposed British membership, which was not acquired until 1973.

VI. CONCLUSION

How have historians judged Britain's role in the creation of the EU? Clemens A. Wurm argues that Britain's influence in Europe was reduced by its failure to participate in negotiations leading to the ECSC, and by its later withdrawal from negotiations leading to the EEC.⁶⁰ Stuart Croft writes, "although the British were successful in undermining . . . moves towards [European] unity, they were forced to pay a heavy price. Not only did they have to abdicate the leadership of Europe, they were also excluded from further political developments . . . for the next two decades."⁶¹

Philip Thody quotes Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee on his reasons for not joining the ECSC: Attlee said that Britain was "not going to join a group of nations in which we have just saved four of them from the other two . . ."⁶² Thody points out the similarity of this comment to remarks made by the fictional civil servant Sir Humphrey Appleby to his Minister in the British television comedy of the 1980s, "*Yes, Minister*", in which Humphrey explains that the British government has

had the same foreign policy objective for at least the last five hundred years—to create a disunited Europe. In that cause we have fought with the Dutch against the Spanish, with the Germans against the French, with the French and

59. *Id.* at 719.

60. Wurm, *supra* note 6, at 245.

61. Croft, *supra* note 8, at 626 (addition to original).

62. PHILIP THODY, AN HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE EUROPEAN UNION 4 (Routledge 1997).

the Italians against the Germans, and with the French against the Italians and the Germans⁶³

Is the judgement of history justified? The British handling of deeper European integration in general and the ECSC proposal does appear comical in retrospect. Britain's empire has declined. The relationship with the Commonwealth has diminished in importance. Its actions alienated the U.S. It applied for EEC membership in 1961, only to be kept waiting until 1973. The conclusions of numerous historians appear correct: Britain made a serious mistake in reacting to the ECSC. What is also apparent is that the U.S. made a greater contribution to the successful birth of the EU. Its light-touch approach, underpinned with deadlines and *soto voce* instructions to European diplomats to support the French government proposals, helped start a process that continues 50 years later and that, in a broader European context, has helped bring peace to a troubled region. Even with the defeat of the Lisbon Treaty in the Irish referendum on June 12, 2008, the EU will continue in its all-important goal of promoting peace in this part of the world.

63. *Id.* at 4-5 (quoting *Yes, Minister: The Writing on the Wall*, BBC television broadcast, Mar. 24, 1980).

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