

THE ROME TREATIES: A HISTORICAL DATE IN EUROPE'S HISTORY?

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For the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Treaties of Rome

In Europe, but also in many other places in the world, people have been celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the signature of the Treaties of Rome. Everybody here knows what happened 50 years ago on the 25th of March 1957. So I will not recall the content of the treaties establishing EURATOM and the European Economic Community. You remember that building on the success of the Coal and Steel Treaty, the six founding countries decided to expand cooperation to other economic sectors. They signed the Treaty of Rome, creating the European Economic Community (EEC), or 'common market'. The idea was for people, goods and services to move freely across borders.

Actually, what I would like to do is rather to underline the signification of the signature of these treaties in the history of Europe and try to exemplify why and in how far this was an historic moment. To do this, I will start with some quotations from the Declaration on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the signature of the Treaties of Rome, initiated by the German presidency of the EU and adopted by the EU chiefs of states and government as well as by the presidents of the European Commission and of the European Parliament. In the declaration it is said, that: "For centuries Europe has been an idea, holding out hope of peace and understanding. That hope has been fulfilled. European unification has made peace and prosperity possible. It has brought about a sense of community and overcome differences. Each Member State has helped to unite Europe and to strengthen democracy and the rule of law. Thanks to the yearning for freedom of the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe the unnatural division of Europe is now consigned to the past. European integration shows that we have learnt the painful lessons of a history marked by bloody conflict. Today we live together as was never possible before. We, the citizens of the European Union, have united for the better. [...] With European unification a dream of earlier generations has become a reality. Our history reminds us that we must protect this for the good of future generations. For that reason we must always renew the political shape of Europe in keeping with the times. That is why today, 50 years after the signing of the Treaties of Rome, we are united in our aim of placing the European Union on a renewed common basis before the European Parliament elections in 2009. For we know, Europe is our common future."

As a scholar, I like to analyze speeches in order to understand their political and social meaning. We have here a sort of grand narrative of European integration that can be summarized as follows: European integration after 1945 and 1950 marked a decisive break with the recent European past of national conflict and war, which it was designed to overcome (Kaiser 2006, 192).

In the following, I will deconstruct this grand narrative and show what makes the signature of the Rome treaties such an important moment in European history. I will first try to explain what a historic moment is (1), then recall what was the historical context was at the time in year 1957 (2). In the third and fourth sections, I will talk about the ideas and principles that led to the treaties, as well as the methods introduced, before underlining the meaning of consciousness and giving a brief assessment of the achievements, of the results of the process initiated 50 years ago.

a) What is a Historical Moment?

Historiography is always a question of interpretation, of making choices between dates, facts and trends. And what we can observe in the Berlin declaration is the attempt to produce meaning, to give sense to the process of integration in Europe in highlighting which its main achievements are and giving some reasons why this is good for Europe and for the Europeans. In other words this kind of argumentation based on an interpretation of history contributes to build the legitimacy of European integration through showing that it goes along with what the German philosopher Hegel calls the “positive evolution of history”.

But how historical is a historical moment? One can say that such a moment marks a fundamental change in the course of history, a turning point, something so radically different, that afterwards you can say there is something before and something after this date. In this sense, there are two other historical moments that should be mentioned in connection with the 50th anniversary of the Treaties of Rome: One is the decision taken in Yalta 1945 to separate Europe in two spheres of influence. The second was the fall of the Berlin Wall 1989. Both events did not only have a strong political, societal and economical impact on the map of Europe, they changed our perception of Europe’s destiny as well. And what makes such moments “historic” is that through the momentum’s specific features, part of the past “work” on the present and lead the course of the world in a specific direction. With the return of Eastern Europe after 1989, it became for instance obvious the past would be no less unspeakable: but now it would, unavoidably have to be spoken. After 1989 nothing – not the future, not the present and above all not the past – would ever be the same (Larat 2006).

However, one should precise that a historic moment is something different than a major event or a milestone. To put it in a nutshell, it is as a special moment in the

evolution of mankind – or more specifically of a particular group of people - that will leave one's mark in the collective memory and shed a new light on the history of this group. It is therefore not by chance, that the US magazine Newsweek titled its last issue "The golden moment of Europe". But what is also important, is that the protagonists of this moment have the consciousness that something very particular happens.

b) A Specific Context

Having said that, we should ask ourselves whether it is correct to highlight the importance of the Rome Treaties, especially in comparison to other major events in Postwar Europe. Indeed, may the real turning point in Europe's recent history actually have started before? For instance, what about the US aid after 1945? Was it not more important for Europe than any institutional arrangement? Well, we can say that the Marshall plan had paved the ground for the material recovery of Western Europe after WW2 and initiated interstate cooperation and a certain form of integration in this part of the continent. But it was the treaty of Paris 1951 and the Treaties of Rome 1957 that started the economical, moral and political recovery.

After decades of self destruction, integration was seen as a reaction against decline. Remember for instance that just one year before, France and Great Britain had experienced a diplomatic debacle with the expedition in Suez. In the 50' and 60', countries like France and the UK and also the Netherlands and Belgian were engaged in a painful process of disengagement from their former colony.

Let me here quote the report released in 1956 by the Belgian prime minister Spaak in which he states that Europe, which once had the monopoly of manufacturing industries and obtained important resources from its overseas possessions, today sees its external position weakened, its influence declining and its capacity to progress lost in its divisions. Division and fragmentation were the problem. Hence, it is important to notice, as the US but English born historian Tony Judt writes, that the EEC was grounded in weakness, not strength (Judt 2006, 303).

What's more, after the failure of the European Defence Community, it became obvious that political or military integration was not feasible, at least for the present. (Judt 2006, 302) The emphasis should hence be placed on European economic cooperation an area in which national self-interest and cooperation could be pursued in concert without offending traditional sensibilities.

c) The Ideas and Principles that led to this Change

Everything in the twentieth-century of Europe is back-shadowed by the thirty-year war that began in 1914. WW1 had been a European civil war. After civilized Europe

committed suicide and entered in a phase of self-destruction, the world of yesterday was over (as put by the Austrian novelist Stefan Zweig). The illusion of a European civilization as a factor of human progress vanished with the discovery of gas chambers, mass destructions, millions of displaced peoples, Europe had lost its soul and experienced a tremendous moral failure. The reaction to this was the *cris du coeur*: “never again nationalism!”. The wish not to repeat the same mistakes of the past led to what some regard as a miracle: “Post national Europe had learned the bitter lessons of recent history. An irenic, pacific continent had risen. Phoenix-like from the ashes of its murderous past” (Judt 2006, 5).

d) The Method

The experience of World War II was constitutive for the development of the European Union. Former arch-enemies had to be embraced into a community of mutual interests in order to render another war impossible. The success of the community was based on consent to the division of Europe, with the consequence that the other half of the continent was written off, and, with the blessing of democracy, peace, and economic upturn, kept out. It was only with the unexpected collapse of the Soviet empire that Eastern Europe re-entered the European Union's expanded political horizon (Eurozine 3, May 2005). But long before this, in the difficult time of the starting cold war, French Foreign minister Robert Schuman took the initiative and made a seminal, epoch-breaking proposal aimed at making new wars impossible through interdependences, sharing sovereignty and the pooling of competences.

Later, in the Paris Treaty establishing the Coal and Steel Community and even more evidently in the treaty establishing the European Economic Community, two factors were combined and have ensured the success of this unique endeavour: The innovative solutions and the pragmatism of the so-called Jean Monet Method and idealism contained in the preambles and declarations that accompanied these treaties. Integration shall now take place on the basis of law and no longer enforced by arms.

e) The Awareness to Write a New Page in Europe's History

From the very beginning and that means the Schuman declaration of the 9th of May 1950, references to the past and to history can be found in all major speeches and declarations of European leaders who tried to push forward European integration. Yet, what was particular and remarkable in March 1957, is that the persons who were attending the signature ceremony were all well aware about the fact that they were writing a new page in Europe's history. They had the rare consciousness to experience a special moment.

From a symbolic point of view, the place where they met was loaded with a high degree of history: it was on the Capitol Hill, the antic place of the roman power. As stressed by the mayor, Mr Tupini in his welcome address, this ceremony was taking place under the auspices of the eternal Rome. The *genius loci* (the spirit of the place) evocated in the discourses was more than a simple form of rhetoric: it signalled the willingness to link the objective of – as stated in the EEC Treaty – “*an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe*” with the glorious past of the Roman Empire, for instance, the *pax romana* and the Roman civilisation. Even if the setting up of the EEC diverges in many points from all the dreams of *restoratio imperii* from Charlemagne to Napoléon, it makes it clear that unification within a single political framework was a situation to which one should strive to return to.

While some participants, such as the Italian foreign minister, underlined the significance of the moment, which opened a new era in the history of the people of Europe, the Belgian prime minister, Paul Henri Spaak, even wagered to forecast that, if the work already begun continued, then the 25 March 1957 would become a major date in European history.

According to the Dutch Premier, Luns, there were no doubts that the Treaties would bring peace and prosperity to Europe. Do not forget that this prediction was made 50 years ago, before everything started. Retrospectively, in the EU’s official historiography, the focus on such institutional acts,¹ combined with the emphasize put on the role of the founding fathers in the process of European integration, serve to make these declarations sound somewhat like self-fulfilling prophecies. Notwithstanding this tendency, at this moment there was a real consciousness among the protagonists that what they were doing would change the course of Europe’s history.

Due to the Cold War, the countries under Soviet domination were not able to join the endeavour launched with the Schuman plan, nor the Coal and Steel Community nor the European Economic Community. After some enlargements, the number of EEC Member States rose from the initial 6, to 12 at the end of the 80s, but they were all from Western Europe. The political events that occurred in Central and Eastern Europe between 1989 and 1991 changed the whole situation: for the first time since 1950, pan-European unification was possible.

In 2003, 46 years after the signature of the Rome Treaties and 14 years after the fall of the Berlin wall, the representatives of Europe’s citizens were gathered in another symbolic place of European history, at the Acropolis in Athens - the birth place of Democracy - to celebrate the signature of the adhesion of 10 new countries to the European Union. As stressed in the declaration, this meeting was again seen as “a

¹ See the presentation given by on the EU home page at http://www.europa.eu.int/abc/index_en.htm, and in the document, *Europe in 12 lessons*, by Pascal Fontaine, also available on the official internet site of the Union.

historical moment”. By joining the process of unification carried out by the European Union, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe were no longer excluded from the process of integration which had begun more than 50 years ago. The bitter consequences of World War II were finally overcome and the initiative taken in 1957 was completed.

According to this view, with the EU enlargement to the East, Europe was entering a new era which prolonged the one initiated with the Schuman plan and the Rome treaties. This time, we will see the accomplishment of the dream of unity, which could not be achieved before because of the Cold War. For Romano Prodi, the President of the Commission, the enlargement of the European Union meant a “*Common commitment to unify our continent and finally to end the artificial division that the Iron Curtain imposed on us for more than half a century*”.²

The awareness of experiencing historic moments like 1957 and 2003 comes from the consciousness that Europe should be actor of its own destiny and hence from the willingness to actively shape and construct our common future. As stressed by Robert Schuman in his speech introducing the presentation of his plan on May 9th 1950, his proposal was very different from the previous ones. It was about voluntarism, the willingness to break with old solutions and to dare something new: “*il n'est plus question de vaines paroles mais d'un acte, d'un acte hardi, d'un acte constructif*”

e) Impressive Achievements

Fifty years without war between any of the countries which now make up the EU is unprecedented in history. Integration, and expansion from 6 to 27 countries, has played a major part in that. The EU has at the same time become a force for peace in the world. European integration that created a space of freedom, peace and democratic prosperity can, with good reason, be called “the most successful peace movement ever” (W. Lipgens).

Democracy is without a doubt one of our core shared values. Among these values, the EU has entrenched freedom by adding new freedoms – freedom for people and goods to move across its borders. We can study, work or live in another EU country with a minimum of red tape, and enjoy health and social benefits everywhere. Travel across the EU is increasingly passport-free. The EU has also laid the foundations of an area where borders are not an obstacle to justice or security. Just as the Paris Treaty establishing the ECSC was an economic peace treaty, the EEC treaty was deemed as a political mechanism for modernisation and economical integration

² Address by Romano Prodi to the conference on EU enlargement, www.eu2004.ie.

These are unique achievements, not only regarding Europe's history and destiny, but also with regards to world affairs. This is certainly why, two weeks ago, the US House of Representatives unanimously passed a Congressional Resolution recognizing the 50th anniversary of the Rome Treaty. Congressman Robert Wexler, Chairman of the Europe Subcommittee and a senior member of the House of Foreign Affairs Committee, sponsored the resolution which congratulates the 27 members of the European Union on this historic occasion and expresses strong support for deepening relations between the United States and Europe: "European unification and the formation of the European Union is one of the most remarkable global developments of the last fifty years," says the resolution. "From the ashes of two world wars, the Holocaust and the Cold War, Europe has united under the common goals of human rights, economic prosperity and environmental protection. The Treaty of Rome marked the beginning of this process, and today the EU is a remarkable success that benefits close to 500 million European citizens and tremendously strengthens the transatlantic relationship".

I don't know how the transatlantic relations will evolve in the near future, but I'm convinced that the long and difficult way Europe went during the last 50 years on the path of EU integration represents a major contribution to the development of a peaceful and civilized world. And even these are very abstract goods, even if the young generations in the EU take these achievements for granted, I'm convinced that we Europeans should always keep in mind what we have accomplished when we discuss and dispute about the future of the EU and how we shall continue on the way to an ever closer union. And there are no better words to conclude as to repeat the conclusion of the Berlin declaration "For we know, Europe is our common future".