
Statement by EP Conference of Presidents on the Schuman Declaration anniversary

Statement by European Parliament's President and leaders of political groups on the Schuman Declaration anniversary (9th May).

The celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration comes at a moment when Europe is facing its most difficult challenge since the end of the Second World War: a health, economic and social crisis triggered by the outbreak of COVID-19.

The Schuman Declaration, which laid the foundations of our European Union, started a unique and genuine political project to guarantee peace and prosperity and to improve the lives of all European citizens. Already 70 years ago the Schuman Declaration contained the idea that "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." This step-by-step approach led to the European Union we know today.

Since the very beginning, the European project has been about building a political and economic community, based on the values arising from our common European history, like solidarity, openness, freedom, tolerance, equality in diversity and respect for the rule of law.

Jean Monnet, the author of the Schuman Declaration, declared that "people do not change if it is not out of necessity, and they only see the need in times of crisis". Each crisis is an opportunity to take a step forward. Likewise, the current crisis heightens the urgency for the European Union to start to work on how to become more effective, democratic and closer to citizens. Over the last 70 years the world has changed dramatically and the role of the European Union is more crucial than ever. In a new emerging geopolitical order and in the context of an ecological emergency, our responsibility is to accept to become a global force of stability and peace, rule of law, sustainability and multilateralism.

This crisis has shown at a very high cost that the EU remains an unfinished project and that the failure to organize solidarity, or to counter the on-going attacks on fundamental rights and rule of Law are not theoretical debates.

Because we stand on the shoulders of giants, the capacity of the European institutions and all Member States to respond to current health, social, economic, environmental, security and institutional challenges should be at least commensurate with the political ambition contained in the Schuman Declaration. We need to strengthen and deepen the democratic legitimacy of the European Union, and ensure its policies and leadership are the expression of the citizens of Europe in a fully-fledged European parliamentary democracy.

We believe that it is time for an ambitious debate on the future of Europe with EU citizens and all stakeholders, in order to shape the Union in which we want to live together and to find an agreement among European citizens on the political foundations we want to build for the recovery of the European continent. Solidarity has become the main condition of our future common achievements.

In this context, we continue to believe that the planned European-wide project, the “Conference on the Future of Europe” is the appropriate forum to fulfil this ambition. The Conference needs to be convened as soon as possible and has to result in clear proposals by engaging directly and meaningfully with citizens, in order to bring about a profound reform of the Union, enabling it, above all, to take decisions in the common European interest so as to make the EU more effective, united, democratic, sovereign and resilient.

We reaffirm Parliament’s position and take note of the Commission’s position that the Conference process, its concept, structure, timing and scope should be agreed upon jointly by the three institutions. Therefore, we call on the Council to come forward with an ambitious position concerning the Conference.

Beyond the joy and gratitude at having been united and at peace for 75 years, we need to remember that solidarity does not end at our borders. The current pandemic reminds us of the importance of multilateralism in tackling common challenges and crises together. Instead of reverting to national egotism, a strengthened and more integrated European Union that collaborates closely with international partners in a spirit of mutual fairness and understanding should be the way forward.

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