

The founding fathers of Europe and the ECSC mother

The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), which emerged from the Treaty of Paris signed on April 14, 1951, was a world of men, of “founding fathers” who pooled the heavy industries that were then entrusted to the ECSC (coal and steel). Its virtuous image as a founding myth and mold for today’s EU—a builder of European peace and reconciliation—is essentially male. Women, who were invisible, worked in the shadows of the High Authority of the ECSC and the other institutions that were established during the 1950s. They especially performed “office” duties (secretaries, stenographers, interpreters), which were an important part of the burgeoning Community administration, for instance as interpreters who served as links between men who did not speak the same language.

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The ECSC, mother of the European Communities

Over the decades, the first of the European Communities became the original “mold” for European construction within institutional discourse (commemorative documents, brochures, etc.). The line of descent continues today through the European Union (EU), which is seeking legitimacy to counter the challenges it faces.

The ECSC was often presented as a peaceful revolution that marked the end of the bellicose period of Europe’s history. In hindsight, it has been seen as the first stone in a European edifice that developed afterwards, although no one in 1950 truly imagined that this small sector-specific community would have such success without the United Kingdom, a central European economic and industrial power. The ECSC was the foundational work—the “beginning of Europe” in Jean Monnet’s works—much more so than the many other projects and organizations of the postwar period (Council of Europe, Organisation for European Economic Co-operation, etc.). The ECSC even became a common heritage, with a street in Dudelange, Luxembourg being named after it.

The first image of the ECSC, or perhaps the first lasting one, is the press conference that called for its creation on May 9, 1950, held by Robert Schuman (1886-1963), the French Minister for Foreign Affairs. The ideals associated with the construction of Europe were already present in the Schuman declaration: peace, democracy, solidarity, reconciliation. The community had its first “father” who served as its face, Robert Schuman, as well as another who was inseparable from it, Jean Monnet. The ECSC thus took advantage of the aura of the “great men” (Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer, Alcide De Gasperi, Jean Monnet) that launched it. In 1952, the governments of six member states appointed J. Monnet (1888-1979), who developed the coal-steel pooling project and led the negotiations in 1951, to head the High Authority of the ECSC (which he left in 1955). He single-handedly embodied the ECSC, daughter of the great men of history and mother of the European Union.

A male executive

A typology emerged in the customary language and historiography of the construction of Europe, that of founding fathers who made significant contributions to the unification of Western Europe. Each one of European Community's founding states had its creator, who was identifiable for his national community: Alcide De Gasperi (1881-1954) for Italy, Robert Schuman (and J. Monnet) for France, Konrad Adenauer (1876-1967) for Germany, Paul-Henri Spaak (1899-1972) for Belgium, Joseph Bech (1887-1975) for Luxembourg, and Jan Willem Beyen (1897-1976) for the Netherlands. They were all leaders of the European project at a given time, and helped to make it a reality through their engagement.

The ECSC's central institution, the High Authority, which operated from 1952-1967, was the first European executive, with broader supranational powers than those attributed to the Commission of the EEC in 1957. It had nine members, and until its merger with the Commission in 1967, saw the appointment of 19 men and no women to lead it. In addition to members of the High Authority and their cabinets, the team of senior civil servants was also, on the whole, male. During the 1950s, nobody imagined a female member of the High Authority of the ECSC, or a female Director-General who would manage the European coal and steel sectors, whose workforce was 95% male, as revealed by the High Authority itself: "we are aware that personnel in the steel industry is predominantly male; the number of female laborers is so low that it not listed as a specific item in the ECSC's ordinary statistics" (High Authority, *E.C.S.C. 1952-1962. Results, limits, outlook*, Luxembourg, 1963, p. 172). The same was essentially true with respect to coal. The situation was similar in other ECSC institutions such as the Court of Justice, with seven male judges appointed in 1952, as well as for the Common Assembly. Of the 78 members from the national parliaments that were part of the Assembly upon its creation, there was a single woman, Margaretha Klompé (1912-1986), who was an MP, the first female minister in postwar Holland, and an exception.

Female secretaries and interpreters

When they were present, women did not hold leading positions in executive bodies, although there were many of them at a lower level, in the important machinery of the ECSC's administration. Women's paid work increased in the decades following the Second World War, with employment distributed according to the following pattern: men working as laborers and managers, women working in a developing service sector. The same was the case within the High Authority of the ECSC: female employees performed only "office" activities (secretaries, stenographers, interpreters, etc.). Not very visible in the memory of both actors and the historiography, they nevertheless took part in the institution's daily operation, for instance as secretaries and interpreters, who could also be men. Ursula Wenmakers (1928-1963) translated the exchanges between the President of the High Authority (J. Monnet) and its German Vice President (F. Etzel), doing so for hours on end by ear. She was thus the indispensable link between the two most important figures in the High Authority. Ursula Wenmakers—who was "there for every one of [our] steps," to quote from J. Monnet's *Memoirs*—literally died from exhaustion at the age of 34, according to an account from another interpreter. However, these women were largely forgotten afterwards, and absent from reference works on the High Authority. Sometimes made anonymous, they often disappear from photograph captions, or are referred to as "an interpreter" out of habit in this male world. The "mother" of the EU, the foundational ECSC, was thus born of great men, and implemented by a male executive that made the rare women who were involved

invisible. They were certainly not at the controls, but they nevertheless took part in the proper functioning of the burgeoning administration.

The history of the European Community is recent, and the European Union is often subject to criticism—and even questioning—by some media and part of the political class of European societies. In order to legitimize it, a discourse has developed regarding its line of descent, especially in connection with the expiration of the ECSC treaty in 2002, which led to celebrations and tributes. The Community, which became the EU, counters the criticism of Eurosceptics—who present it as the product of “technocrats”—by emphasizing that it was born from major historic figures who were themselves legitimate in their national and European activity. This quest for guardian male figures connects with the European Union’s search for an identity beyond the terms used to refer to it in treaties (economic community, Single Market, monetary union). It goes so far as masking the diversity of the first community administration, and the men and women who were a part of it.

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Members of the High Authority: D. Spierenburg, P. Malvestiti, A. Coppé (front), and P. Finet, P.-O. Lapie, H. Potthoff, A. Wehrer, F. Hellwig and R. Reynaud (back). © EC, 1959.



F. Etzel, U. Wenmakers, A. Coppé, J. Monnet and D. Spierenburg, April 30, 1953, Luxembourg.

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