

The role of the Action Committee for the United States of Europe

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The role of the Action Committee for the United States of Europe

After resigning in November 1954 as President of the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), Jean Monnet was once more at liberty to speak and act as he saw fit. Drawing on the lessons learnt from the failure, in August 1954, of the European Defence Community (EDC), he decided to concentrate on mobilising political forces to promote European revival. True to the principle of sectoral integration tried by the ECSC, the only existing Community at that point, Monnet sought ways of extending the powers of the High Authority to include transport and energy. He was not the only one to be thinking along such lines. The ECSC Common Assembly also called for the Community's powers to be extended to include transport and energy sources such as gas, electricity and nuclear power. Monnet, for his part, attached particular importance to nuclear issues. He was convinced that the civilian applications of atomic energy could provide an effective solution to the energy crisis threatening Europe's future and wanted to make nuclear power the driving force behind European revival. He thought that a European atomic energy commission would have several advantages. Worried by the confrontation between Washington and Moscow, Monnet argued that only a European atomic community would be able to save Western Europe from the economic and political decline threatening it. Furthermore, as well as providing a way of developing a new energy source in Europe, the atomic sector had not yet given rise in Europe to national industries concerned about defending vested interests. A European atomic community would provide a framework for developing a nuclear power industry, while preventing the Federal Republic of Germany from developing nuclear weapons. Monnet therefore insisted on the purely peaceful aims of the projected community. He was in favour of the United Kingdom being associated with the atomic pool and wanted to take the US Atomic Energy Commission as an example for its operation.

Monnet was not initially in favour of the establishment of an overall common market, but he realised that it was a priority for some European partners, including the FRG and the Netherlands. He consequently decided to link the two projects in the hope of achieving some synergy. Following the failure of the EDC, France felt unable to launch another diplomatic initiative, so Monnet appealed to Paul-Henri Spaak, the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs, and asked him to promote the revival programme in his contacts with his European counterparts. In May 1955, seizing on the projects submitted by Johan Willem Beyen, the Netherlands Minister for Foreign Affairs, the three Benelux countries drafted a joint memorandum. This document drew on the strands common to the plans advanced by Monnet and Beyen, proposing both sectoral actions for transport and energy, in particular nuclear power, and the establishment of an overall common market in Europe. It was on the basis of the Benelux memorandum that, some days later, the Six, meeting in Messina, officially revived the European project. It took Jean Monnet only a few months to set up the Action Committee for the United States of Europe (ACUSE). The Action Committee, officially created in Paris on 13 October 1955 to serve as a pressure group, brought together union leaders and heads of the Christian-Democrat, Liberal and Socialist political parties in the Six. Monnet wanted to form a common front of parties and unions to provide political backing for action to promote Europe taken at a technical and diplomatic level. This was to be achieved by bringing pressure to bear directly on the governments and parliaments of the various countries and to prevent European projects becoming bogged down in discussions between experts. From the outset, the Monnet Committee set out to 'make the Messina resolution of 2 June into a real step towards the United States of Europe ... It would not content itself with mere cooperation between governments. It was essential that States should delegate some of their powers to European federal bodies ...' On 18 January 1956, at its constituent meeting, the Action Committee for the United States of Europe issued a declaration calling on the governments of the Six to create a new supranational community for the development of atomic energy along similar lines to the ECSC. In an attempt to increase the impact of its programme, the Monnet Committee submitted its declaration for approval by the parliaments of the Six. Although it had only about 100 members, the Committee enjoyed considerable influence, which it used to promote European revival and, more particularly, the Euratom initiative, which Monnet considered to be the priority, its objectives being clearer and closer to the interests of France. Throughout the negotiations, Monnet stayed in very close contact with some of the experts taking part, in Val Duchesse, in the drafting of the Treaties establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom). Lastly, it was as a result of pressure from Jean Monnet and the Action Committee that Guy Mollet, the French Premier, finally agreed, in November 1956, to the establishment of the Committee of the 'Three Wise Men', which was given the task

of drawing up a report on the energy situation in Europe, the prospects for nuclear power and the programme to be carried out jointly under Euratom.