

Article – Europe must emerge stronger from this crisis



In 1950, Europe was in crisis, still devastated physically and economically by the effects of World War II, and politically searching for a way to ensure that the horrors of the war could never be repeated. Against this dark backdrop, on 9 May, French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman outlined his vision for how Europe could achieve this objective, by creating common institutions to make war not just unthinkable but materially impossible. His words changed the course of history and laid the foundations on which his generation and future ones built the European Union we have today.

The 70th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration comes at another moment of crisis for Europe. Across our continent, more than 100,000 have died because of the coronavirus in the last months. Hundreds of millions have faced unprecedented restrictions in their daily lives to help contain the spread of the virus.

As leaders of the three main EU institutions, our thoughts today are first with all those who have lost loved ones. Our gratitude is to the essential workers who have continued to work throughout this crisis. Those on the frontline in our hospitals and care homes, fighting to save lives. But also the delivery drivers, shop assistants, police officers, all those working to ensure that daily life can continue.

We are also thankful for the spirit of solidarity and civic responsibility that European citizens have shown. The millions who have volunteered to help in whatever way they can during the crisis, be it shopping for an elderly neighbour, stitching face masks, or raising money to give to those in need. Europe is at its best when it shows warmth and solidarity.

Europe acted boldly to ensure that the single market could still function, allowing medical supplies to arrive where doctors and nurses needed them, ventilators to arrive where they could save lives, and food and essential goods to get to our shops where Europeans could find them on the shelves.

We took unprecedented decisions to ensure national governments had the fiscal capacity they needed to tackle the immediate crisis. We transformed the European Stability Mechanism into an instrument to fight Covid-19. We have made €100 billion available to keep Europeans in jobs, by supporting national short-time work systems. And the European Central Bank provided unprecedented support to ensure lending to people and businesses continued.

We still need to do much more. As our member states are tentatively and gradually lifting lockdowns and restrictions, the first priority must remain saving lives and protecting the most vulnerable in our societies. We must continue to do all we can to support research into a vaccine for the coronavirus. The success of the coronavirus global response pledging conference of 4 May, which has raised €7.4 billion and has brought under the same roof global health organisations to work together on vaccines, treatments and diagnostics, shows just how rapidly the world can rally behind a common cause. We need to sustain this mobilisation and keep the world united against coronavirus. Europe can play a decisive role here.

At the same time, all member states must have the fiscal space needed to deal with the ongoing medical emergency.

And we need to prepare for the recovery. After fearing for their lives, many Europeans now fear for their jobs. We must restart Europe's economic engine. Let us remember the spirit of Robert Schuman and his peers – inventive, daring and pragmatic. They showed that getting out of moments of crisis required new political thinking and breaking from the past. We must do the same and recognise that we will need new ideas and tools to support our own recovery. We must recognise that the Europe that will come out of this crisis cannot and will not be the same as the one that entered it.

First, we must do more to improve the lives of the poorest and most vulnerable in our societies. Too many in Europe were struggling to make ends meet before this crisis even began. Now millions more face an uncertain future, having lost their jobs or businesses. Young people and women are particularly affected and need concrete and determined support. Europe must be bold and do all that it takes to protect lives and livelihoods, particularly in the areas most affected by the crisis.

Our Union must also be healthy and sustainable. One lesson to learn from this crisis is the importance of listening to scientific advice and taking action before it is too late. We cannot put off addressing climate change and must

build our recovery on the European Green Deal.

And we must be closer to citizens, making our Union more transparent and more democratic. The Conference on the Future of Europe, which had been planned to launch today and was only delayed due to the pandemic, will be essential in developing these ideas.

We are at a time of temporary fragility and only a strong European Union can protect our common heritage and the economies of our member states.

Yesterday, we commemorated the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II. We must always remember the horrors and barbarism of war and the sacrifices made to end it. Today, we reflect on what happened next. Let us remember the 1950s generation who believed that a better Europe and better world could be built out of the ruins of war – and then went on to build it. If we learn those lessons, if we remain united in solidarity and behind our values, then Europe can again emerge from crisis stronger than before.

Parliament President David Sassoli, European Council President Charles Michel, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen