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History of European cooperation after 1945

After the end of the Second World War, the desire for economic and political union grew stronger in Western Europe. As early as September 1946, the British statesman **Winston Churchill** (1874-1965) referred in a speech to his vision of a 'United States of Europe'. In 1950, the French Foreign Minister, **Robert Schuman** (1886-1963) set out his ideas for a united Europe. In response to this initiative, the governments of the Benelux States and of France, Italy and the Federal Republic of Germany signed a treaty establishing the **European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)** in Paris on 18 April 1951. The idea of founding the ECSC came from the Commissioner-General of the French National Planning Board, **Jean Monnet** (1888-1979), who also became the first President of the High Authority of the ECSC in 1952. After a projected **European Defence Community** had been thwarted by the opposition of the French National Assembly in 1954, efforts were focused on the creation of a Common Market. The negotiations to that end proved tough in the early stages. On 25 March 1957, the ECSC Member States signed the Treaties of Rome, the aim of which was the establishment of a common European market without customs duties or quantitative restrictions in the framework of a **European Economic Community (EEC)**, combined with a **European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom)**. The key objectives set out in the Treaties of Rome – a common market, freedom of movement and common agricultural, trade and competition policies – were gradually achieved in the course of subsequent years. In 1963, **Charles de Gaulle** (1890-1970), President of the French Republic, and **Konrad Adenauer** (1876-1967), Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, signed the Franco-German Treaty of Friendship, which was to become the political engine of the European integration process.

Despite many setbacks, the Communities had a powerful appeal for neighbouring European countries. In 1972, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark acceded to the Communities. Parallel to the enlargement process, efforts were being made to strengthen gradually the institutional roots of the Community. In 1970, the Member States of the EEC agreed on closer coordination of their foreign policies in the framework of a system of **European political cooperation (EPC)**. In addition, a Franco-German initiative led to the creation of a **European monetary system (EMS)** with a common exchange-rate mechanism, which entered into force on 1 January 1979, and with the declared aim of establishing **economic and monetary union**.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the European integration process experienced a powerful upsurge, which is primarily associated with the names of France's President **François Mitterrand** (1916-1996), and the German Chancellor **Helmut Kohl** (born 1930). Besides being instrumental in extending the powers of the European Parliament, they played a key role in decisions taken in December 1985 to complete the internal market by 1992, to extend the principle of majority voting within the Council and to integrate European political cooperation into the legal framework of the EEC. Also in 1985, agreement was reached in **Schengen**, Luxembourg, on the gradual elimination of checks on persons at the internal borders of the Community. Further important milestones were the accession of Spain and Portugal to the European Communities on 1 January 1986 and the drafting of the **Single European Act**, which supplemented and amended the Treaties of Rome and entered into force in 1986. At the beginning of 1995, the accession of Austria, Finland and Sweden brought the number of Member States of the European Union to 15.

The fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 and the collapse of Communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe opened a new chapter in the process of European unification. In order to support the reform process, the EU concluded association agreements, known as **Europe Agreements**, with countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the early 1990s.

In February 1992, the **Maastricht Treaty** established a European Union as a "new stage in the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe". At the heart of the measures adopted in Maastricht was the decision on the completion of **economic and monetary union**, the third and final stage of which began on 1 January 1999. Finally, on 1 January 2002, the **euro** was introduced as a single European currency. The driving force behind this project was **Jacques Delors** (born 1925), who presided over the Commission for many years. In June 1997, the Heads of State or Government of the EU reached agreement on the **Treaty of Amsterdam**. At the heart of this revision of the EC and EU Treaties were improvements in the institutional efficiency of the EU and the creation of the office of a **High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy**. In view of the forthcoming eastward enlargement of the Union, the Treaties required further reform. In December 2000, the European Council agreed in the **Treaty of Nice** that voting by qualified majority would henceforth be the norm for Council decisions and that the composition and working methods of the Commission would be adapted to take account of the new situation after enlargement.

On 1 May 2004, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Cyprus acceded to the EU. They will shortly be followed by Romania and Bulgaria. This largest round of enlargement in the history of the EU has overcome the division of Europe that resulted from the Second World War.

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