

THE LEGACY OF THE SCHUMAN DECLARATION: ENLARGEMENT AND THE GEOPOLITICAL FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract: It goes without saying that in modern day and age major political organizations as European Union shape the global political weather. The Union officially started evolving since the formation of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 but the idea of united Europe has been developing over the centuries. Furthermore, we can confidently say that one of the founding father of the European Union who envisioned a united and peaceful Europe was Robert Schuman. Schuman put forward the idea that lasting peace in Europe required economic cooperation, for instance with the resources of coal and steel that would unite the French and German people in 1950, which was highly necessary after World War II. Therefore, it is fundamentally important to provide qualified answers to some noteworthy questions surrounding the issue, for instance: who was Robert Schuman and what role did he play in the development of the Union? What is the Schuman declaration and why was it important? What role does European Union play as a global actor? What is the enlargement process and how will it change the future state of the EU? What is the relations between the EU and Georgia and what part does Georgia play strategically?

Keywords: Schuman Declaration, European integration, Geopolitics, Supranationalism, Post-war Europe

НАСЛЕДСТВОТО НА ДЕКЛАРАЦИЯТА НА ШУМАН: РАЗШИРЯВАНЕТО И ГЕОПОЛИТИЧЕСКОТО БЪДЕЩЕ НА ЕВРОПЕЙСКИЯ СЪЮЗ

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Резюме: В съвременния свят е безспорно, че големи политически организации като Европейския съюз формират глобалната политическа среда. Съюзът официално започва да се развива с основаването на Европейската общност за въглища и стомана през 1951 г., но идеята за обединена Европа се развива в продължение на векове. Освен това с увереност може да се каже, че един от бащите-основатели на Европейския съюз, който е визионер на обединена и мирна Европа, е Робер Шуман. През 1950 г. Шуман предлага идеята за траен мир в Европа, основан на икономическо сътрудничество, например чрез общото управление на ресурсите от въглища и стомана, които да обединят френския и германския народ, което е от изключително значение след Втората световна война. Следователно е от съществено значение да се дадат обосновани отговори на редица важни въпроси, свързани с темата, като например: кой е Робер Шуман и каква роля играе в развитието на Съюза? Какво представлява Декларацията на Шуман и защо е важна? Каква роля играе Европейският съюз като глобален актьор? Какво представлява процесът

на разширяване и как той ще промени бъдещето на ЕС? Какви са отношенията между ЕС и Грузия и каква стратегическа роля има Грузия?

Ключови думи: Декларация на Шуман, европейска интеграция, геополитика, наднационалност, следвоенна Европа

Introduction

The Schuman Declaration of 1950 laid the ideological and institutional foundations for European integration, marking the beginning of a transformative project for peace, unity, and economic cooperation. This article explores the enduring legacy of the Declaration, particularly in the context of the European Union's enlargement policy and its evolving geopolitical role.

The relevance of the given topic is evident in today's political context since the Union's role in formatting political weather is significant. The Schuman Declaration's vision of a supranational Europe continues to guide the Union's efforts to promote stability, democracy, and resilience in its neighborhood. By examining historical milestones in EU expansion and current challenges posed by shifting global power dynamics, regional conflicts, and strategic dependencies, the article argues that enlargement remains both an importance and a test of the EU's geopolitical maturity.

The development of the EU continues to remain a topic of debate in various societies, especially in modern times as the EU faces new aspirants from the Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans. Additionally, many people discuss whether the Enlargement will change a state of the Union as an organization since as the global actor the stability of Europe shifts the stability and peace on a global scale.

Consequently, the article aims to respond to the above-mentioned questions and topics through an in-depth analysis of specific political processes and history.

Who was Robert Schuman?

Robert Schuman was a French politician who had the idea of united Europe through economical connections. He was born on June 29, 1886, in Luxembourg. He was originally French but raised in a region with strong Franco-German identity (Alsace-Lorraine). Schuman was bilingual and bicultural, which deeply shaped his desire for Franco-German reconciliation.

He studied law, economics and political science in Germany and France, which helped him to become a lawyer and public service in France. Furthermore, deeply influenced by Catholic social thought and Christian democracy, he emphasized peace, justice and cooperation.

His political career started in 1919 as a member of the French National Assembly. During WWII, Schuman was arrested by the Gestapo for resisting Nazi occupation, from which he luckily, managed to escape. After the war, Schuman became a key leader in rebuilding France, including as: Minister of Finance, Prime minister of France and Foreign Minister in 1948-1952.

The Schuman Declaration was a political proposal made on May 9, 1950, by Robert Schuman, who was at that time the French Foreign Minister. In the aftermath of World War II, Schuman proposed placing French and German coal and steel production under a single, joint authority – open to other European countries as well.

This idea became the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951, which was the first institution that would later evolve into the European Union. It serves as a clear example of how closely economics and politics are intertwined, that is why Schuman tried to solve political destabilization in Europe through strengthening economic ties between them.

The Schuman Declaration holds a big importance in history firstly for preventing war between two major countries, France and Germany, who had fought with each other in 70 years before the declaration. By linking their economies – starting with coal and steel, essential for war industries - Schuman hoped to make war between them “not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible.” It also served as an asset for rebuilding trust and unity, considering that post-WWII Europe was left devastated and divided. The declaration was a first step toward reconciliation, especially between France and Germany. It is considered that the Schuman Declaration created a new kind of Europe by introducing the idea of shared sovereignty – countries voluntarily giving up control over some areas in exchange for lasting peace and mutual benefit. This was the birth of European integration.

"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."

- Robert Schuman, 1950.

European Union as a global actor

Being a global actor for the EU means influencing the world not just through its size and wealth, but also through its policies, values, and strategic decisions. Most importantly, The EU is

not a single country or a simple organization, it is a supranational union of 27 member states who share same values of multilateralism, human rights and conflict prevention.

It has played key roles in nuclear negotiations with Iran, established peace missions in the Balkans and has supported Ukraine throughout the war. The core values of the Union are respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, freedom of movement and rule of law.

The EU plays major role in the process of sustaining peace and integrity not only in the Europe, but also throughout the globe. Main goals of the organization are to maintain stability and security, promote economic cooperation and a single market, ensure freedom of movement (people, goods, services, and capital), uphold democracy, rule of law and human rights. We should also mention the fact that in areas like climate, trade and technical development the Union comes as a global leader.

Future Enlargement of the EU

The criteria for joining the European Union are officially known as the Copenhagen Criteria, established in 1993 at the European Council summit in Copenhagen. These criteria state the conditions a country must meet to become an EU member.

The political criteria of Copenhagen requirements include stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities. Additionally, it consists of functioning market economy, the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU, ability to adopt, implement, and enforce the EU's laws and regulations (the *acquis communautaire*), Commitment to the aims of political, economic, and monetary union. Being an EU member also means having good relations with neighboring countries, alignment with EU foreign policy and necessarily, no major unresolved territorial disputes.

Nowadays, EU is planning to expand in the regions of the Western Balkans and the Eastern Europe. We should mention A European Union foreign policy initiative launched in 2009, aimed at building a closer relationship between the EU and six Eastern European countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus (*suspended*), Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

Current candidate countries in the path of joining the organization are Georgia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine, while the potential candidate is Kosovo.

We must also take into consideration the stages of the Enlargement Process which starts with firstly application - A country formally applies to join, after the candidate status – EU decides if it can start negotiations, which means covering 35 chapters of EU law and policy. Next step is reforms – candidate country must make legal and institutional reforms, accession treaty – signed and ratified by all EU members and the candidate. Lastly, after finishing all the necessary steps comes a membership, when a country officially becomes a full member of the organization.

Furthermore, many people debate about the future state of the union or how will the enlargement process will affect its condition considering the fact that the Union as an organization is still evolving. Should it form as one country consisting of states? Should it develop one working constitution and have united army? Unfortunately, answers to these questions are unclear, however, it is non-questionable that the Union will follow the principles of Schuman and other founding fathers who believed that stability would be established only with unity and trust.

Georgia and the European Union

In 1992, the European Union officially recognized Georgia's independence and initiated cooperation, focusing primarily on humanitarian and technical aid. On April 22, 1996, in Luxembourg, the Presidents of the European Commission and Georgia, along with representatives of EU member states, signed the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA). The agreement came into effect in 1999 and was initially valid for 10 years, after which it was automatically renewed each year unless either side objected. It encompassed a wide range of areas, committing both parties to collaborate in pursuing political, economic, and social objectives.

In 2009 Georgia took one step closer to the integration process with the EU by joining the EU program designed for closer political and economic integration of six post-Soviet states. In 2014, we can remember the Association Agreement, which most importantly, consisted of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), which allowed Georgian goods to enter the EU market with fewer barriers. Secondly, it included Political Association, when Georgia committed to EU-style reforms as rule of law, democracy and human rights.

In addition, since 2017, Georgian citizens with biometric passports can travel visa-free to the Schengen area for short stays up to 90 days, which marks as a big milestone for EU-Georgia relations.

One of the most remarkable event of the integration process is the EU granting candidate status to Georgia in December 2023, which is tied to further reforms in democracy, rule of law and depolarization of politics.

Because of its strategic location Georgia is a vital addition to the EU due to several interconnected geopolitical, economic and security reasons. Georgia sits at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, in the South Caucasus, bordering the Black Sea. It provides an essential corridor for energy transit routes, for oil and gas pipelines from the Caspian region bypassing Russia and Iran. Its location makes it a bridge between Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East, which is valuable for the EU's connectivity strategy. It goes without saying, that the EU seeks to reduce the dependance on Russian Gas, Georgia's geostrategic location plays a key role in achieving this aim. We can also mention the project of the Southern Gas Corridor, which brings Caspian gas (from Azerbaijan) to Europe via Georgia and Turkey.

Georgia is one of the EU's closest partners in the Eastern Partnership (EaP), launched in 2009. It serves as a key partner in the Black Sea Region, a buffer zone between Russia and the EU. The EU is increasingly treating enlargement as a geopolitical necessity, especially after the war in Ukraine – this gives Georgia a stronger chance of integration if it delivers on reforms.

In summary, Georgia is on a formal path to EU membership, with candidate status granted. The next steps depend on political will, reform progress, and geopolitical developments. Georgia's EU aspirations reflect both a popular dream and a strategic necessity. The geostrategic position, democratic movements, historical context and the role it plays in the Black Sea region gives Georgia a significant role in the Eastern Partnership and on the path of joining the EU.

Summary

Taking everything into consideration, Robert Schuman was and still is one of the most honorable mention of the founding fathers of the European Union. Alongside with the other, also important, founding fathers he believed in the united Europe, which would only be achieved with in the belief of trust and unity between countries. His bilingual and bicultural identity shaped his desire of unity between Germany and France, which led to the formation of the European Coal and Steel community. It is worth noting that the peace on the European continent reflects on the global scale.

In order to establish long-lasting peace and stability and reduce the Russian influence the organization is planning on enlargement in the western Balkan and eastern Europe countries, which is associated with many challenges and the long process of integration.

Furthermore, ties between Georgia and the European Union have expanded notably since the country's independence in 1991. At first, the cooperation centered mostly on financial aid and technical support, but over time it has grown stronger and more diverse, particularly following Georgia's participation in the European Neighborhood Policy and later the Eastern Partnership.

In December 2023, Georgia received EU candidate status, marking a historic milestone on its road to European integration. However, the country still struggles with major challenges, including fragile democratic institutions, political polarization, concerns over judicial independence, and the continued occupation of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region by Russia. Political polarization and inconsistent reform efforts add further obstacles to progress.

Despite these setbacks, the EU remains an active supporter of Georgia, particularly through initiatives like the DCFTA (Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area), which promotes legal and economic alignment. Public support for EU membership also remains strong within Georgian society. Moreover, Russia's war in Ukraine has heightened Georgia's strategic importance for the EU.

Lastly, while EU membership is still a long-term goal, candidate status provides Georgia with a clear framework for moving closer to Europe. With the right reforms and genuine political commitment, the country has the potential to advance further toward full integration.

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