How the EU was created

By Rita Mukasa

By the time the Second World War ended in the late 1945, Europe was plagued by poverty, unemployment and economic instability. The founding fathers of the European Union came to realize that the effects of the interwar war transcended the battlefield to the economic block across much of the continent.

Broken by the ravages of the conflict, the major economies in Europe agreed to foster economic cooperation, culminating in the Treaty of Rome that established the European Economic Community (EEC).

The treaty was signed in 1957 to increase economic cooperation, create a huge single market of countries that trade with one another to mitigate future wars and insurrections.

The single market revolves around the ‘four freedoms’ of: movement of goods, services, people and money. After years of successful cooperation, the name changed from EEC to the European Union in 1993 to reflect the wider principles that had united Europeans. Meanwhile, the EU is a political and economic union of 28 member states that are located primarily in Europe with an estimated 510 million people.

The countries are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

However, the six founding countries were: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

Since its creation, no major war has ravaged Europe for over 70 years, making it the longest period of peace and stability in Europe’s written history.

In 2012, the EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in recognition of its role in helping to transform most of Europe from being a continent of war to becoming a continent of peace.

The Union is the largest contributor to the development aid of all nations, with 30% of its budget dedicated to peacekeeping missions, guaranteeing peace in a world with more than 40 active armed conflicts.

Economically still, the European Union is the largest economic block in the world with total exports of the 28 members exceeding 17 trillion euros, representing more than one third of total global exports.

It is also the top trading partner for 80 countries aside the world’s largest source and destination for foreign direct investment.

EU member states are the world’s leading aid donors, providing more than half of total official development aid.

In 2015, the European Union was recognized by the United Nations for its development aid efforts.

This union is run by five main bodies including: European Parliament, Council of the Union, European Commission, Court of Justice, and the Court of Auditors.

Political, economic cooperation

While the EU began as an economic union, its sphere of influence has evolved into more areas from climate, environment and health to external relations and security, justice and migration.

Similarly, EU policies aim to ensure the free movement of people, goods, services, and capital within the internal market besides enacting legislation in justice and home affairs, and also maintain common policies on trade, agriculture, fisheries, and regional development.

By 1957, only twelve of the EU member states were democracies but today, there are 28. The EU is the largest union of democracies in the world.

Additionally, its members are governed by the principle of representative democracy, with citizens directly represented in the European Parliament and Member States in the European Council and the Council of the EU.

The Union has delivered more than half a century of peace, stability and prosperity, helped raise living standards and launched a single European currency: the euro which is the second most important global reserve currency, with almost 1.5 trillion euros held by central banks around the globe.

With the abolition of border controls between EU countries, people can travel freely throughout most of the continent, making it easier to live, work and travel.

Since 1960, EU countries stopped charging customs duties when they trade with each other.

Environment

Since 1972, when the first European environmental policy was launched, the EU has been a major player in efforts to combat environmental destruction.

In the fight against climate change, the EU has demonstrated that sustainable development and economic progress can go hand in hand.

It has cut CO2 emissions by 22 percent between 1990 and 2015, while growing its economies by 50%, according to the European Commission’s European Political Strategy Centre.

EUROPE DAY

NEW VISION, Wednesday, May 9, 2018

Future and threats to unity

Previously, no nation state had ever left the EU, until the UK voted in 2017 referendum to leave the bloc. Only Greenland, one of Denmark’s overseas territories, has left the EU after a referendum in 1982.

The withdrawal of the UK, known colloquially as ‘Brexit’, triggered discussion on the rising discontent expressed by other member countries considering an exit from the union.

Critics say the EU has taken too much power from the UK government, its regulations are costly to the British economy and without them, Britain would be able to sign other trade deals with growing economies like China and India. They also say that the EU wastes taxpayers’ money on excessive bureaucracy - citing leaders’ monthly trips, which cost 180m euros (£163m) per year.

Similarly, critics believe Britain is being held back by the EU, gets little in return for the money it pays in and would be better taking back control of its borders.

However, several countries around the continent are, however, keen to join the bloc, although the process to admit new members might not start until after 2020.

According to the EU Website, membership is open to any country with a democratic government, a good human rights record, and sound economic policies.

EU law, with focus on making its governing institutions more transparent and democratic.

More powers have been given to the directly elected European Parliament, while national parliaments play a greater role, working alongside the European institutions.

In turn, European citizens have an ever-increasing number of channels for taking part in the political process. The bloc is a world leader in research and innovation, home to some of the world’s leading scientists, economists, authors, doctors, artists and activists. The region is responsible for one quarter of global expenditure on research and one third of global patent applications.

EU Founding fathers

Meanwhile, this peace and stability should not be taken for granted for it has greatly steered the development of the member states from the visionary leaders who inspired the creation of the European Union.

Without their energy and motivation, the peaceful, united and prosperous Europe they achieved would be nowhere if not behind the scenes on the world map.

The founding Fathers include; Sicco Mansholt, Jean Monnet, Robert Schuman, Paul- Henri Spaak, Altiero Spinelli and Konrad Adenauer.


EU Budget

The union operates on a budget of 145bn Euros and these are contributions from member states with Germany being the largest contributor with 21.36%. However, each country receives money back from the EU to support development and other projects.