

The Jean Monnet House: A place in Europe's history

SUMMARY

In keeping with the wishes of Jean Monnet and his closest colleagues, who dreamt of seeing his family home transformed into a place in which young people could come together to discuss and share ideas, the European Parliament has made this public place of recollection a venue of choice for people seeking to learn more about the way the European Union works, and discover the environment in which one of the architects of today's Europe lived and worked.

It was here that many of the plans which would have a decisive bearing on the future of France and Europe were drawn up. Close to Paris, but at the same time offering a refuge from the clamour of the French capital, it was here that Jean Monnet developed his vision of peace and European unity. The European Parliament bought the house in 1982. Today, managed on a day-to-day basis by the House of European History, the Jean Monnet House offers, through a permanent multimedia exhibition, an insight into both the private world of Jean Monnet and his career and political ideals. Since 2013, the Jean Monnet House has been officially recognised by the French Government as a 'Maison des Illustres' and is also part of the Network of Political Houses and Foundations of Leading Europeans, an initiative behind which the European Parliament is a driving force.

Today, Parliament is breathing new life into the Jean Monnet House, in order to raise awareness of Monnet's work and to pass on his values of peace and solidarity to a wider public by organising new activities and hosting numerous events in Houjarray.



Jean Monnet House in Houjarray.
Source: European Parliament.

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For almost 40 years, the European Parliament has owned the house in which Jean Monnet, one of the 'founding fathers' of the European Union, spent the last part of his life. In December 1982, it bought the house at Houjarray (in the hamlet of Yvelines, situated close to Monfort-l'Amaury, 45 km south-west of Paris) where Jean Monnet lived and worked for more than 30 years. It was in this very house that in 1975 Jean Monnet received from Georges Spénale, the then President of the European Parliament, Parliament's Gold Medal for his decisive contribution to the process of building a united Europe.¹ It was also here that he learnt of the decision taken by the Luxembourg European Council meeting in April 1976 to proclaim him an 'honorary citizen of Europe'.²

Jean Monnet, a 'Founding Father' of Europe

Jean Monnet bought the former farmhouse in 1945, on his return from the United States. At the time, the former Deputy Secretary-General of the League of Nations and international financier was preparing to become the first director of France's Commissariat général du Plan de Modernisation et d'Équipement (National Planning Agency for Modernisation and Infrastructure). It was in that role that he was closely involved in the management and distribution of the resources made available under the Marshall Plan for the reconstruction of Europe. That would be followed by the great adventure of Franco-German reconciliation, which was to give practical expression to the idea of European integration.³



Picture taken in the garden at Houjarray in spring 1950, during the preparation of the Schuman Plan. From left to right: Bernard Clappier, head of Robert Schuman's private office, Robert Schuman, French Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Jean Monnet, Director of the French National Planning Agency for Modernisation and Infrastructure. Source: European Parliament.

Keen to move to the countryside where he could indulge his habit of taking an early morning walk before starting work,⁴ Monnet was introduced to the house and the surrounding area by his sister, who was already living on the edge of the Rambouillet forest. Without hesitation, he bought the Houjarray house with its thatched roof from a Swedish doctor, who, following the death of his wife in a bombing raid at the end of the war, had decided to return to Sweden. Monnet and his family moved in quickly without having any major work done on the house.

It was in this house that he devised the Schuman Plan which led to the establishment, in 1952, of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC).⁵ And it was here that, much later, he wrote his memoirs and received many

European leaders and foreign heads of government eager to seek his advice and hear his views on topical events.⁶ It was here that Monnet liked to talk in front of the fire with journalists and international commentators. And it was here, finally, that Jean Monnet died on 16 March 1979, surrounded by his family. He was buried in a quiet ceremony in the small cemetery of Bazoches-sur-Guyonne.

The purchase of the House by the European Parliament

Wasting no time, in the month after his death a number of his former colleagues suggested to Emilio Colombo, President of the European Parliament, that it would be a good idea to purchase the property, symbolising as it did the shared historical and cultural heritage of European citizens.⁷ Some of Monnet's closest friends recounted that shortly before his death he had voiced the wish that one day his house should become a meeting place for young people.⁸ A few months later, and

despite an unfavourable opinion issued by the College of Quaestors,⁹ Parliament entered the cost of the purchase in its provisional budget for 1980. In December 1981, the decision to buy the Jean Monnet House for the updated sale price set by the French Land Agency was ratified by Parliament's enlarged Bureau. It was not until Monnet's widow, Silvia, died in August 1982, however, that the purchase was completed in a notarised act.¹⁰

From the point of view of the principles and formalities involved, the matter was not a simple one. Some people in the Secretariat were sceptical as to whether Parliament should be buying the house, which belonged to an eminent person who had never been a member of the European Assembly and which, moreover, was not close to its places of work nor in the capital of a Member State.¹¹ Others were more concerned about the legal and budgetary procedures involved. Pieter (Piet) Dankert, the new President of Parliament, therefore lost no time in contacting Gaston Thorn, the President of the Commission, to determine the course of action required should the latter institution wish to join Parliament in purchasing the building.¹²

Convinced that this step could contribute to the joint efforts by the institutions to raise public awareness of the European idea, and in keeping with Article 211 of the Treaty of the European Economic Community (EEC) on the representation of the European Communities, the Commission preferred, however, to draw up a delegation of power in order to authorise and mandate the President of the European Parliament to purchase the Jean Monnet House on behalf of the three Communities (ECSC, EEC and Euratom).¹³ At the same time, Parliament obtained from the French Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance (which was headed by Jacques Delors at the time) an assurance that it would be exempt from transfer duties on the property transaction when the land registration formalities were carried out at the competent land registry.¹⁴

For Parliament's Bureau, the priority was to safeguard Europe's historical heritage and bring to fruition a symbolic act honouring the memory of Jean Monnet. In other words, the aim was to raise the profile of an emblematic place which was imbued with the spirit of Europe and give that place a role. The immediate task, therefore, was to refurbish the building so that it could quickly be made available to the European Communities for non-profit-making activities.

A venue for meetings and an information centre about the European integration process

Parliament's Committee on Youth, Culture, the Media, Information and Sport immediately drew up a number of proposals concerning ways in which the Jean Monnet House could be used. A number of site visits involving members of that committee were organised. Once the building and the large garden had been renovated, MEPs' idea was to turn the house into a venue for meetings and an information centre about the European integration process. They emphasised the need to preserve the nature of the house as a family home and to return it to the state in which Jean Monnet knew it at the end of his life.¹⁵ At the same time, a number of public relations agencies were asked to submit practical proposals for ways in which the building could be used. This was, however, a difficult task, given that all the furniture had been removed and, in 1978, the archives had been transferred to the



Photo of Jean Monnet taking his daily morning walk in the countryside, 1952.
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Jean Monnet Foundation for Europe in Lausanne. The aim of the foundation, which is based at the Ferme de Dorigny on the banks of Lake Geneva, is to contribute to the efforts to move the European integration process forward by drawing inspiration from the thinking, working methods and achievements of Jean Monnet (by organising conferences and seminars, hosting researchers, releasing publications, etc.).

At the same time, Jean Monnet's former colleagues in Paris were setting up the Friends of Jean Monnet Association for the purpose of keeping alive his memory, his work and his teachings. That association was established in 1986. Reflecting its resolve to prepare without delay events to mark the centenary of Jean Monnet's birth in 1988, the association secured a grant from the Ile-de-France Regional Council to recreate Jean Monnet's office and reconstitute his library, in order to give visitors a better sense of the atmosphere of the period.¹⁶ It also went to considerable lengths to collect objects and souvenirs which had belonged to Monnet (books, pictures, photographs, facsimiles of manuscripts and correspondence, a miner's lamp, an ashtray commemorating the establishment of the common steel market, etc.) in order to make the house an authentic evocation of Jean Monnet's life and work.¹⁷

Transformed into a museum devoted to the life of its former owner and the workings of the European Community, the Jean Monnet House was ready to be opened to the public. The inauguration ceremony took place on 12 June 1987, in the presence of two former Presidents of the European Parliament, Pierre Pflimlin and Simone Veil. The Lausanne Foundation provided the explanatory panels for the permanent exhibition and the audiovisual presentation on Monnet's life and the beginnings of the European unification process. The political circumstances were favourable: the Community institutions proclaimed 1988 'European Jean Monnet Year' to mark the centenary of his birth.¹⁸ In France and in other Community Member States, the year was punctuated by celebrations and events, such as exhibitions,



On 12 June 1987, Étienne Hirsch, President of the Friends of Jean Monnet Association, unveils — in the presence of the former Presidents of the European Parliament Pierre Pflimlin and Simone Veil — the commemorative plaque stating that Jean Monnet lived in Houjarray from 1945 to 1979.

Source: European Parliament.

university seminars, the issuing of a stamp bearing a likeness of Jean Monnet, the installation of commemorative plaques, the unveiling of busts of Monnet in public places, competitions involving schoolchildren, and television and radio broadcasts. In the wake of the celebrations, French President François Mitterrand announced his decision to have Jean Monnet's ashes transferred to the Panthéon in Paris.¹⁹ In 1990, an agreement was signed between the Friends of Jean Monnet Association and the European Parliament giving the former the task, under the responsibility of Parliament's Paris Information Office, of running and managing the site.²⁰

A new lease of life for the Jean Monnet House

More recently, the European Parliament decided to become more involved in the use of the house by developing a series of new activities to be carried out there. Work was done to enlarge the conference room and transform the one-hectare park around the house. Paths were created to offer an itinerary which took visitors past a small amphitheatre seating up to 40 people. A building providing accommodation will shortly open on neighbouring land which the European Parliament has purchased. There is also a souvenir shop offering books, Europe-themed objects and tourist brochures. Open all year round, the Jean Monnet House receives several thousand visitors each year for educational activities, conferences, workshops, professional seminars and private events. Since 2013, the Jean Monnet House has been part of the 'Maison des Illustres' network. The French Ministry of Culture awards this status to places whose purpose is to preserve the memory of women and men who played a key role in the political, social and cultural history of France.

Since 1 July 2018, the House of European History (European Parliament's Directorate-General for Communication - DG COMM) has been responsible for the day-to-day running of the site and it now has a team on the spot. With a view to raising the profile of the Houjarray site, the House of European History is responsible for the reception arrangements for visitors, the cultural and educational programme, the communications strategy and media activities, event organisation, the



Commemorative plaque affixed to one of the gables of the Jean Monnet House in 1987.
Source: European Parliament.



The Jean Monnet House from the gardens, 2019.
Source: European Parliament.

development of partnerships with other institutions and the management of the collections and exhibits. For its part, the Jean Monnet Association continues to act as a partner and adviser in connection with the activities organised on the site.



Interior view of the living room of the Jean Monnet House.
© Colombe Clier.

While a visit to Jean Monnet's home allows visitors a peek into his private universe, the first-floor museum illustrates his vital contribution to the European unification process after the Second World War. The updated interactive permanent museum (projections, touch screens, timeline, 'Europe Experience' table) sets Jean Monnet the person and his career in their historical context. It enables visitors to explore his projects and achievements in the very place where the original ideas took shape. Its multimedia activities

illustrate the way Jean Monnet shaped today's Europe and how the European institutions affect the day-to-day lives of ordinary people. Available in French, English, German, Spanish and Italian and tailored to the interests and expectations of particular groups, guided visits can be arranged which focus on specific subjects and topical issues, for example the institutional workings of the European Union and the European peace settlement from a historical perspective. Thematic workshops can also be organised for school groups in order to offer visitors an insight into the way Europe works and enable pupils to explore topical issues such as European citizenship or the measures Europe is taking to combat climate change. Temporary, online and travelling exhibitions will also be arranged, and new tools will make it possible to manage and expand the collections of historic objects and archives kept on the site.



The new exhibition area in the Jean Monnet House.
Source: European Parliament.

Since 2017, the Jean Monnet House has been part of the Network of Political Houses and Foundations of Leading Europeans, set up by the European Parliamentary Research Service (DG EPRS). The main objective of the network is to develop, under the patronage and with the support of the European Parliament, exchanges and active cooperation between the houses and foundations of leading European figures from the post-Second World War period, and in particular those who played a major role in the history of European integration. It also includes institutions devoted to

individuals whose private homes have not been preserved. Lastly, the network seeks to coordinate the activities of the political houses and foundations of leading Europeans more closely with those of the European Parliament, in particular in the area of relations with the public, through the sharing of experience and know-how.

At present the network includes the houses of Konrad Adenauer (Bad Honnef, Germany), Robert Schuman (Scy-Chazelles, France, and Luxembourg), Jean Monnet (Houjarray, France), Sir Winston Churchill (Chartwell, United Kingdom), Sir Edward Heath (Salisbury, United Kingdom) and François Mitterrand (Jarnac, France: property of the Institut François Mitterrand, Paris) and the foundations

established in memory of Willy Brandt (Unkel, Germany), Jean Monnet (Lausanne, Switzerland), Alcide De Gasperi (Pieve Tesino, Italy), Louise Weiss (Saverne, France), Altiero Spinelli (Ventotene, Italy), Mário Soares (Lisbon, Portugal), Bronisław Geremek (Warsaw, Poland) and Václav Havel (Prague, Czechia).

The network's website can be accessed at:

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/infographics/politicalhouses/>

The European Parliament's aim is to pool these bodies' resources in order to foster dialogue and cooperation between them, in particular by lending its support to an ambitious communication policy. But Parliament is also keen to ensure that lessons are learned from our shared political history. That is, moreover, one of the reasons why in 2019 the Jean Monnet House became the seat of the Jean Monnet Academy, which, under the supervision of the European Parliament's Directorate-General for Personnel (DG PERS), offers professional training programmes for Parliament staff (induction courses, in-service training, thematic excursions) and *team-building* events or away days for departments of the Secretariat.

Today, all these initiatives serve the same purpose: making the Jean Monnet House a living historical site and a source of inspiration which embodies the European idea and where members of the public, with the aid of interactive exhibits and hands-on activities, can learn about the history and workings of the European Union. Conscious of the need to safeguard a heritage site which bears witness to Jean Monnet's life and work, Parliament wishes to bring his achievements and values (peace and solidarity) to a wider audience.



The meeting room of the Jean Monnet House, where numerous events are held.

Source: European Parliament.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Jean Monnet Foundation for Europe, Lausanne, file AMP 21, document 21/30; letter of 30 October 1975 from Jean Monnet to Georges Spénale, 1 p.; *Agence Europe Bulletin*, No 1850, Houjarray, 30 October 1975, p. 1.
- ² F. Forêt, 'Le leadership en représentations: Jean Monnet entre mémoire nationale et mémoire communautaire', in A. Smith et C. Sorbets (eds), *Le leadership politique et le territoire – Les cadres d'analyse en débat*, Rennes, PUR, 2003, pp. 163-181.
- ³ For Monnet's commitment to European unity and a survey of the latest historical research, see in particular P. Perchoc, *Jean Monnet, l'inspirateur – Un père de l'Europe*, EPRS, European Parliament, November 2017.
- ⁴ É. Roussel, *Jean Monnet (1888-1979)*, Fayard, 1996, p. 862. In 1971, in reply to questions from the British journalist Alan Watson, Monnet explained that for more than 40 years he had taken a walk lasting at least one hour each morning in order to consider his plans and organise his ideas. Cf. 'Dialogue avec Alan Watson (1971)', in H. Rieben, C. Camperio-Tixier and F. Nicod, *À l'écoute de Jean Monnet*, Jean Monnet Foundation for Europe/Centre for European Research, 2004, pp. 239-244.
- ⁵ R. Mayne, *The Father of Europe. The life and times of Jean Monnet*, Fondation Jean Monnet pour l'Europe, Coll. Débats et documents, No 12, 2019, p. 111 et seq.
- ⁶ J. Monnet, *Mémoires*, Fayard, 1976, p. 612 et seq.

- ⁷ Historical Archives of the European Parliament, Luxembourg (HAEP), EU.HAEU/PE0.OD.BURE.514/BUBE-19790404/0010: Bureau, minutes of the meeting of 4-5 April 1979, Strasbourg, p. 27.
- ⁸ F. Fontaine, 'Plus loin avec Jean Monnet', in J. Van Helmont and F. Fontaine, *Jean Monnet*, Jean Monnet Foundation for Europe/Centre for European Research, 1996, p. 156.
- ⁹ AHPE, EU.HAEU/PE1.OD.QUES.PV/QUES-19801015/0010: College of Quaestors, minutes of the meeting of 15 October 1980, Strasbourg, p. 5.
- ¹⁰ AHPE, EU.HAEU/PE1.OD.BURE.BURE.PV/BURE-19820914/0010: Bureau, minutes of the meeting of 14 September 1982, p. 25.
- ¹¹ AHPE, PE1 P1 280/CABI CABI-19791011 0020: Confidential note from Raymond LeGrand Lane (Director-General of Information and Public Relations), to François Scheer (Director of the Cabinet of Simone Veil), Luxembourg, 13 October 1980.
- ¹² AHPE, EU.HAEU/PE1.P2.200/PRES.220/RELA.223/RICM/RICM-1982-310/0050: Letter from Piet Dankert to Gaston Thorn, September 1982.
- ¹³ AHPE, EU.HAEU/PE1.P2.200/PRES.220/RELA.223/RICM/RICM-1982-310/0050: Letter from Gaston Thorn to Piet Dankert, 16 September 1982; letter from Gaston Thorn to Piet Dankert, Brussels, 3 November 1982; Cf. *Official Journal of the European Communities*, No C-3/3, 5 January 1983, p. 6.
- ¹⁴ AHPE, EU.HAEU/PE1.P2.200/PRES.240/EXTE.241/EXEM/EXEM-1982-190/0020: Letter from Piet Dankert to Jacques Delors, Brussels, 11 August 1982.
- ¹⁵ AHPE, EU.HAEU/PE2.OD.BURE.515/BURE-19851127/0080: EP/Committee on Youth, Culture, the Media, Information and Sport (rapporteur: Winifred Ewing). Working document on the use of the Jean Monnet House, 16 July 1985.
- ¹⁶ Historical Archives of the European Union, Florence, Pierre Uri collection, PU-176 and 177: Activities of the Friends of Jean Monnet Association), 1986-1987.
- ¹⁷ C. Kølvræ, 'The father on display: the House of Jean Monnet and the construction of European identity', in *Culture Unbound. Journal of Current Cultural Research*, vol. 4, 2012, pp. 747-765.
- ¹⁸ E. Guichaoua, 'Jean Monnet, entre mémoire et histoire', in G. Bossuat and A. Wilkens (eds), *Jean Monnet, l'Europe et les chemins de la paix*, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1999, p. 437.
- ¹⁹ G. Bossuat, 'Les trois visages de Monnet', in *Les Pères de l'Europe : 50 ans après. Perspectives sur l'engagement européen*, Bruylant, 2001, p. 49.
- ²⁰ AHPE, EU.HAEU/SG 04EV.B1700/GEST.1/LOC-350/0030: Letter from Étienne Hirsch, President of the Friends of Jean Monnet Association, to Enrique Barón Crespo, President of the European Parliament, Paris, 20 July 1990.

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