
Introduction

Peter Horn

The European Union¹ is playing an increasingly important role in world affairs. What began after World War II as an effort to insure stability and economic regeneration to worn-torn Western Europe has become the world's largest economic bloc with the admission of its latest ten members on May 1, 2004.

It is a unique organisation, conceived by French businessman-turned-political advisor Jean Monnet and is built on a series of treaties that represent binding commitments of the member states. The process began with the signing, by the original six members (Netherlands, Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany Italy, Luxembourg and of course France), of the 'Treaty of Paris' on April 18, 1951. Often referred to as The Schuman Declaration (the French Foreign Minister at the time) The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) Treaty² pooled coal and steel production in member states under a common authority and resulted in an increase in the community's coal and steel trade of 129%.

In Rome on March 25, 1957 member governments formalised their desire to create an 'ever-closer union' amongst the peoples of Europe with the signing of two additional treaties. The European Economic Community (ECC) Treaty³ merged national markets into a single economic entity and permitted the free movement of goods, people, capital, and services. The European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or EURATOM) Treaty⁴ promoted the furtherance of the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.

Five enlargements have taken place since the signing of the initial set of treaties. In 1973, Denmark, Ireland and the UK joined 'The Six' in becoming the European Economic Community.⁵ They were followed by Greece in 1981; and Spain and Portugal in 1986. In 1995 Austria,⁶ Finland and Sweden joined the 'Group of 12' and The European Union was born. Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Malta and Cyprus became members on May 1, 2004 and 'The Six' have now grown to a European Union of 25 member states. With the admission of its ten new members⁷ in May of 2004, Europe became the world's largest economic bloc with a population of 455 million people (about 50% larger than the USA and a greater GDP). And, with the recent signing of their first constitution by the 25 member states, the East-West divide, which began with the cold war in 1947 has finally been eliminated.

This Special Issue of the *International Journal of Management and Decision Making* focuses on the European Union. It presents a series of pertinent research papers by faculty of Europe's leading business schools, commentaries from regional business leaders, and an interesting paper from the USA on global virtual teams.

Notes

¹See, Columbia Law School, Arthur W. Diamond Law Library, Research Guide: European Union Legal Materials, <http://library.law.columbia.edu/eu/>.

²European Steel and Coal Community Treaty, <http://europa.eu.int/abc/obj/treaties/en/entoc29.htm>.

³Treaty Establishing the European Economic Community, <http://www.hri.org/docs/Rome57/>.

⁴Treaty Establishing the European Atomic Energy Community, <http://europa.eu.int/abc/obj/treaties/en/entoc38.htm>.

⁵Treaty Establishing the European Community, <http://europa.eu.int/abc/obj/treaties/en/entoc05.htm>.

⁶The Maastricht Treaty, Maastricht, 7 February 1992, <http://www.hri.org/docs/Maastricht92/>.

⁷Draft Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe, http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/pri/en/oj/dat/2003/c_169/c_16920030718en00010105.pdf.