

Tracing the history of the Jean Monnet Programme

Marc Maresceau*

1. I feel a bit uneasy, and frankly speaking also a bit reluctant, to take the floor on the history of the Jean Monnet Programme. There are so many more qualified speakers on this topic, also present in this auditorium. It gives me a somewhat surreal feeling to talk to you in the presence of people like Mrs. Jacqueline Lastenousse, Mrs. Belen Bernaldo de Quiros and others, who were or are still today all main actors in the Jean Monnet Project itself.

My own experience with the JM Project is much more limited and is basically twofold. First, as a humble academic servant, working full-time in the field of European integration, I benefited enormously from the various Jean Monnet possibilities. I can only be extremely grateful to the JM Project: without this project my academic life and that of many of my colleagues would no doubt have been considerably different.

But that is certainly not the reason why I was asked to intervene here this afternoon. In the course of 1999, I became ECSA President and was to remain at the head of ECSA till the end of 2002. It just happened that these 2½ years and those following thereafter would prove so crucial for the JM Project, as a whole. ECSA, regrouping the national associations for the study of European integration, and the Jean Monnet Project initiative were indeed closely interconnected from the very beginning and there was almost an umbilical cord relationship between the two. I come back to this specific characteristic of the JM Project later in my presentation and will also say a word on how this has been affected by the recent changes in the JM rules. More importantly, 1999 was really a very unusual year in the history of the Community and that of the European Commission. The Commission had just gone through a real ordeal and there

* Jean Monnet Chair, Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence, Ghent University; former President of European Community Studies Association (ECSA) World.

seemed to be uncertainty about everything. Moreover, all this coincided with big institutional movements inside the Commission, combined with an almost complete change of staff in the DG responsible for the JM Project. Apart from these profound institutional changes and restructuring in staff, I also became rather quickly alarmed by some unexpected signals indicating that ECSA and even the JM Project were perhaps in danger. Would the 10th anniversary of the JM Project also be the beginning of its own end? I must confess that I have never really been able to answer the question properly whether these existential fears were genuine and justified, but, whatever it might have been, the very fact that they arose was more than sufficient grounds to take them seriously. It was clear to me that the existing and coming challenges would need new responses.

2. In order to understand the real roots of what later became the JM Programme, one has to go back to the origins of the European Economic Community itself. After the establishment of the EEC, many universities in the original six Members States rapidly realised that the functioning of the EEC constituted a serious challenge, implying working in depth on the curriculum in various faculties, new orientations in human resources policy, new investments in equipment and library, etc. It was obvious that all this would need time and could not be achieved overnight.

The European Commission, for its part, had established in 1960 a Press and Information Service. A division called “Information universitaire” would play a key role in the establishment of relationships with the academic world in the Member States of the Community. Academic potential was indeed available or could be made available and, as just mentioned, from the academic world there was genuine readiness, and often eagerness, to establish certain forms of cooperation with the Commission. Of course, this would be a gradual process, making progress through step-by-step initiatives.

3. We may consider ourselves to have been particularly privileged by the fact that inside the European Commission, a number of exceptional people with a true vision simply happened to be there at the right moment and on the right place. In the first place mention must be made of M. Emile Noël, the Commission’s “secrétaire exécutif” from 1958 who, after the merging of the executive bodies of the European Communities,

became the Commission's first Secretary General and remained in that position till 1987. Mr. Noël understood very well the sensitivities in the European academic world and strongly stimulated the initiatives for partnership between the Commission and universities. In particular for the activities of the "Information universitaire", his support was crucial and, in more general terms, one may say that this benediction from the top has contributed substantially to creating an appropriate atmosphere for co-operation with the universities.

But it is not enough to have people at the top with a vision, it is also necessary to have people with vision and enthusiasm on the ground. I think nobody will contradict me when I say that the Commission's human face, symbolising university cooperation on European integration has, for a very long time, been that of Madame Jacqueline Lastenouse. It is impossible – as a matter of fact, it would simply be preposterous – to retrace the history of the JM Project without recalling what Mme Lastenouse has done for the Programme, even if this can only be done here in a very fragmentary way. She had (and still has) not only an incredible and rare capacity to bring people together and stimulate academics to take initiatives but her patience coupled with her necessary perseverance were legendary. I would like to stress that well before the launch of the Jean Monnet Action, many important initiatives had already been developed in which Jacqueline had played a pivotal role. I just want to enumerate a few of them, without going into details: the establishment of an inventory on PhD and post-doctoral university research on European integration; the introduction of a fellowship programme for research on European integration; the setting up of a programme of subsidies for publication of PhDs on European integration and an Award of the European Communities for PhD excellence; the creation of a programme for financing study visits of professors and students to the EC institutions; providing support for post-graduate programmes (3rd cycle) on European integration and for colloquia and conferences on European integration and cooperation; the establishment of European Documentation Centres (EDCs) at selected universities¹.

¹ For more details on this pioneering period, see J. Lastenouse, "La Commission européenne et l'étude de l'intégration européenne dans les Universités", in *Ceci n'est pas un juriste... Liber Amicorum Bart De Schutter*, Brussels, VUB Press, 2003, pp. 207-221.

4. If I want to recall all this, it is to make us realise that when the Action Jean Monnet was formally launched in 1989, there was fertile ground in which European Community Studies could prosper. But it is also true that the need for reinforced and perhaps more structured initiatives, that is to say a real “Action”, became more compelling over the years. There was not only the growing complexity of the Community activities, but also the possibility of further enlargement of the Community. It is interesting to note that it is the initiative for the completion of the Internal Market which seems to have acted as a catalyst for the launching of the JM Action. Indeed, new challenges related to the completion of the Internal Market – how could it be else? -, led necessarily to a rapidly increasing demand for European expertise in law, economics and political science. In other words, the Action Jean Monnet responded to a pressing need in the academic world for more competence and know how. And, it may also be said, this was a message which could easily be understood at the political level.

However, it would be wrong to see the JM Action, as it was launched in 1989, merely as a kind of an educational component of the Internal Market. Of course, the educational dimension of the JM Action and later JM Programme was and is terribly important, but I think that the human networking, which participation in the project naturally entails, is at least as important. A JM Project is never a purely solo affair. Many of these JM contacts have led to conferences, workshops, joint initiatives, visiting chairs, joint publications, etc., in short, to establishing “human contacts”. It is particularly difficult to quantify the impact of the human touch of the JM Project, but it is something which I personally consider as irreplaceable and invaluable.

5. In this brief intervention on the history of the JM Project, a few words should be said on the actual founding of the Jean Monnet Action itself. This brings us a strange mixture of, on the one hand, extremely solid and efficient decision-making and on the other hand, unexpected anecdotes. Maybe, you will allow me to recall first one of these anecdotes which I learned from Mme Lastenouse.

In May 1988, M. Santarelli became Director General ad interim of the DG Information, Communication and Culture. In these early days of his new occupation, he decides to make a little tour of his DG and enters into the office of Mme

Lastenouse. Mme Lastenouse had already for a long time been busy thinking about how to create “European chairs”, a bit inspired from what had been going on within UNESCO, with the so-called “UNESCO chairs”. One of the main concerns was to enhance the “visibility” of those professors, working in various fields of Community activity, who, often had to overcome all kinds of obstacles at their own institutions. In a matter of days the approval for this new initiative was given and very rapidly contacts following a double-track were established. First, the Liaison Committee of the European Rectors’ Conference was approached, in order to test the feasibility of the project within the universities. At the time, the Committee included very strong personalities, such as, among others, Prof. De Schutter of the University of Brussels (VUB) and Prof. Cusin (Lyon II), who realised, better than anybody else, the urgent need for a new framework for cooperation and who understood the importance of the new initiative for the academic world. Secondly, the national associations for the study of European integration were contacted -after all, they were the ones with the expertise in the Member States. The combination of the input of the expert professors and of the Rectors brought a rare momentum for action and it goes without saying that all this has been tremendously helpful to create a solid basis for the JM Action. In a true cooperative spirit, the modalities for the Chairs, Courses, Modules, etc. could in an efficient and smooth manner be worked out. On 16 June 1989, the responsible Commissioner, Mr. Dondelinger, was able to present the draft Communication on the Jean Monnet Action and twelve days later, on 28 June 1989, the draft was already approved by the Commission. This Communication is a most interesting document². It explains how the dialogue had been taking place between the service “Information universitaire” of the Commission and the Committee of Rectors and the national expert associations. It also refers to the financial difficulties “qui freinent les réalisations en milieu universitaire” but time was ripe, it seemed, for a new initiative to support the study of Europe in the universities of the Member States. The JM Action would allow a much more systematic approach and would offer a more targeted orientation of the Commission’s interventions than had been possible in the past. The JM Action was conceived as a pilot action and based – I quote again from the original French text- « sur le principe d’un soutien sous forme de subventions pendant une période de démarrage, les coûts de ces enseignements étant ensuite inscrits aux

² SEC (89) 1028/2.

budgets des universités bénéficiaires ». The day after the Commission had adopted the Communication, that is on 29 June 1989, a very well-timed conference was organised in Brussels on “La place de l’Europe dans les programmes universitaires” with the main interlocutors present: the Commission, including even its President, Mr. Jacques Delors, ECSA, regrouping the national associations of professors specialised in EC studies, and the Liaison Committee of Rectors³. On the same day the Commission also released a press communiqué on the Action Jean Monnet emphasising that *inter alia* funding for courses, called “European chairs”, would be provided⁴. The follow-up to the story can easily be summarised: in December 1989 an *Invitation to demonstrate interest* aimed at developing “Europe in university programmes” was published in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*⁵. In the call, which was addressed to the universities, the expression “Jean Monnet Project” was used for the first time. Clearly, with the choice of the name “Jean Monnet”, referring to one of the greatest founding fathers of the European integration process, the new initiative was given a special, symbolic significance and was intended to cover the various facets of the ongoing European integration and cooperation. Finally, the 1989 December Call also clearly acknowledged the specific role of the European University Council composed of members of ECSA Europe and representatives of the Rector’s Liaison Committee. It was explicitly stated that it was the task of the University Council to advise the Commission in the selection process.

6. It is, of course, impossible to retrace the history of the JM Project since 1990 in detail here but one thing will rapidly become clear to any observer: the JM Action, later becoming the JM Programme, has been a tremendous success. The reasons for this, as was already mentioned, are to be found in the first place in the fact that the initiative responded to a genuine need in the academic world. But, of course there is more. It offered a variety of possibilities allowing potential applicants to apply for a project corresponding with their concrete wishes and expectations. I will not further develop this point but there is something else I would like to emphasise instead. It has to do

³ For an account of this Conference, see *Nouvelles universitaires européennes – European University News*, 1989, no. 164. In his conclusions, the Commission President clearly expressed his support for the initiative and emphasised that ‘l’absence d’un travail intellectuel suffisant est un obstacle à la bonne conduite de la construction européenne’.

⁴ See ‘Action Jean Monnet: une action de la Commission pour stimuler l’enseignement sur l’intégration européenne dans les universités’, IP/89/59, 29 June 1989.

⁵ *OJ*, 1989, C 308/13.

with how the project has been managed, allowing the academic community to demonstrate an ever growing interest. This was not necessarily something taken for granted since the double “conditionality” imposed on beneficiaries, could have deterred them from applying for projects. First, beneficiaries of a project had to commit themselves to continue the project for a number of years beyond the period co-financed by the Commission. The first call imposed an obligation “to continue to offer European integration studies for a further period of at least four years”. The underlying idea of this requirement in the early phase of the JM Project was clear: a project, if granted, was to have a lasting effect and “to stabilise” new curricula which had been introduced as a consequence of the project. Later, in 2001, the four years requirement was reduced to two years and, if my information is correct, in the 2010 call for proposals, this requirement may even well disappear all together. Practice seems to show that withdrawal from or suspension of a JM Project is such an exceptional occurrence that it is unnecessary to maintain this as a formal condition in the future. Second, the Commission imposed on the recipients of a project the obligation to provide 25% own financing. Certainly, the rationale behind this requirement can easily be understood: an applicant university had to show commitment to the project it had submitted to the Commission and such commitment could, at least in part, be demonstrated through the applicant’s own input in the project. However, such an obligation – no matter how justified it might at first sight appear – could also have had a serious discouraging effect and virtually have made it impossible for many universities to apply for JM funding. Fortunately, after some hesitation, the Commission has accepted that “own resources” could also be provided through the beneficiaries’ own “staff costs” for the management and implementation of the project and not necessarily through an additional financial input⁶. This interpretation of the concept “own resources” in the framework of the JM Programme which, I think, was followed as from 2001, implied that the Commission accepted “contributions in kind”, something which had been one of the “big issues” on my desk as ECSA President. It must be said that this interpretation was in harmony with the practice followed by the Commission in other actions and programmes. In other words, it is fair to say that, contrary to what some had expected, the imposition of “own resources” as a condition for obtaining a project, has not created an

⁶ For more information on the concept “staff costs”, as it is currently being applied, see European Commission, Education and Culture DG, *Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP). Guide 2009*, pp. 45-46.

insurmountable condition for potential applicants. An inventory of the JM operation can quickly confirm this and makes an impressive picture: since the launching of the Action more than 10,000 applications for JM support have been submitted, the JM Programme has provided support for more than 3500 projects; around 146 Centres of Excellence have been recognised, 839 Chairs granted and more than 2060 Modules accepted. It should also be noted that initially the JM Project only applied to applications emanating from the Member States of the Community. A first extension to Poland and Hungary took place in 1993: that is even before these countries had applied for EU membership. In 1997 the Jean Monnet Programme was also made applicable to applications from higher education institutions in the Czech Republic but, of course, the most substantial extension came in 2001 when the Programme was made available world-wide. In other words, the JM Project had, gradually but surely, become the main tool at European level to stimulate academic excellence in the field of the study of European integration.

Meanwhile also, the scope of the Programme was considerably enlarged through the creation of “Jean Monnet Centres of Excellence” (JMCE) next to the “classical” chairs and modules. But an important institutional link remained between the JM Chair and the JMCE since only higher education institutions already having such a chair were eligible for a JMCE and, moreover, a JM chair holder had to assume academic responsibility for the Centre. The first JMCE recognition was attributed in 1997. Under this label, institutes specialising in European integration studies were in a position to pool their excellence in teaching and research and add a true European dimension to their activities. Another, more recent, JM initiative needs special mentioning. A specific high-level forum for dialogue and reflection on important current European issues, called “Jean Monnet Conferences”, has been created. The first JM Conference was organised in 2002 on the Intercultural Dialogue and since then a great variety of topics such as Gender Equality, Europe’s challenges in a globalised world, the Lisbon Treaty, Sustainable Development, the EU and the Balkans, have been subject of such meetings. Many JM professors have contributed to one or more of these events and even today’s gathering has been organised within this framework. One of the main characteristics of these conferences is the unique mix between political decision-making and academic expertise. The potential impact of this form of JM activity on policy-making should not be underestimated. The

dissemination of know how of European integration and continuous in-depth academic reflection on European integration and cooperation are an evident necessity for the consolidation and development of the European project itself.

7. However, it is not all gold that glitters and there is always a potential danger that initiatives such as JM Project become the victim of their own success. But the most serious danger the project has been facing is the long term lack of a solid financial and legal framework. In order to illustrate this point, I need again to return to 1999 and its immediate aftermath. As I already said before, in that period, the project, which had been based on an enormous dose of goodwill from people inside the Commission and from the European academic community, increasingly came under pressure. A solution had to be found to bring stability and more transparency. Fortunately, at the top of the DG Education and Culture, a sensitive ear was open to listening to these concerns and the then new Director General Mr. Nikolaus van der Pas showed a sense of understanding of this. One of the Director General's main concerns was to bring the JM Project and the Budget Line A 3022 – used for actions conducted by European study and research centres and by the national ECSAs – under one and the same call for proposals. I must confess that to many of us in the academic world, and to me in particular, the technical, administrative and legal effects of such an orientation remained in the dark somehow and it was obvious that adequate information would need to be provided to potential applicants of JM Projects. Be that as it may, and to make a complicated story short, one can say that essentially two different moves have proved to be crucial, not only to consolidate but above all to create a sound financial and legal framework for the JM Project. Thanks to a co-decision legislative initiative, thus also involving the European Parliament, a crucial step was taken with Decision 791/2004/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 21 April 2004. This Decision establishes a Community action programme in the field of education and training “to support bodies and their activities which seek to extend and deepen knowledge of the building of Europe, or to contribute to the achievement of the common policy objectives in the field of education and training, both inside and outside the Community”⁷. Personally, I think it was a good thing that Parliament also became institutionally involved in such an important matter as the definition of the

⁷ *OJ*, 2004, L 138/31.

legal framework of the JM Project. But Decision 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and Council of 15 November 2006 is, without doubt, the most decisive legal document in this respect⁸. This Decision indeed formally incorporates the JM Project in the *Action Programme for Lifelong Learning*⁹ and creates a basis for financial support for a more substantial programme. The reasons for this approach are among others the effectiveness and added value of the European cooperation programmes, including of course the JM Programme¹⁰. Moreover, the Executive Agency for Education, Audiovisual & Culture (EACEA) took charge of the practical management of the Programme. It would be fascinating to try to analyse in detail all the practical and legal ramifications of these moves incorporating the JM Programme in an Integrated Programme for education and training, but you do not have to be afraid, I have not the time to do that here¹¹. I only want to say this: this decision, which is based on Articles 149(4) and 150 EC Treaty, the provisions on education and vocational training, is, in my opinion, after the one on the setting up of the Project itself, the most important landmark in the development of the Programme. It clearly spells out who has access to the Programme, the Programme objectives and the various actions covered. It is interesting to note in this respect that, besides the various types of JM projects in the Member States and third States, special provision is also made for direct support by the Commission of certain institutions whose mission it is to promote programmes of general European interest, such as, for example, the College of Europe; the European University Institute, Florence; European Institute of Public Administration, Maastricht or European Law Academy, Trier.

One has not to be a legal expert to understand the enormous importance of these Decisions, in particular the one of 2006. Indeed, they established the financial and legal framework of the JM Programme in an unequivocal way¹². The feeling of

⁸ *OJ*, 2006, L 327/45.

⁹ The objective of the lifelong Learning Programme was to incorporate the ensemble of existing educational and training programmes in one “Integrated Programme for education and training”.

¹⁰ See Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing an integrated action programme in the field of lifelong learning, COM (2004) 474 final, p. 3.

¹¹ For more information on the Integrated Programme for education and training, see Commission Communication, The new generation of Community education and training programmes after 2006, COM (2004) 156 final of 9 March 2004.

¹² Also the Commission had at various occasions drawn attention to the fact that many of the operations developed in the field of education and training, financed under a variety of headings of the general budget of the EU, had in fact “been carried out without any legal basis”, see, for example, Proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision establishing a Community action programme to promote bodies active at European level

uncertainty about the legal basis which for years had persecuted anyone who had tried to look into this matter, was now finally something that could be consigned to the past. Certainly, on the one hand, the new rules also meant more rigidity and maybe less spontaneity in project formulation and project implementation. But perhaps most seriously of all, the new JM selection rules also affected the place of the European University Council in the project as a whole. I am well aware that some aspects of the changes were perceived by some of us as negative. On the other hand, however, they created at last stability and above all greater legal certainty and a much better financial perspective, all objectives that had been perceived as almost unattainable targets previously. A solid financial and legal framework are indeed vital if we want our JM Programme to survive and develop further. It is precisely at this point that I would like to pay a special and very sincere tribute to Mrs. Belen Bernaldo de Quiros. When, in 2000, Mme Bernaldo de Quiros became responsible for Jean Monnet, she immediately realised that this was the crux of the matter and that there was a compelling need for adjustments in the light of the reforms that were taking place. This was a most delicate operation at that time and various steps had to be taken in a gradual and synchronised manner but she managed that in a truly exemplary way. And, last but not least, all this needed approval at all the different levels, including, of course, as was mentioned before, the very top of the administration and in the very last resort, that of the Director General and the Commissioner responsible for the Project. I can only say that without the stubborn efforts of Mrs Bernaldo de Quiros and the unfailing commitment of my ECSA successors, Prof. Papisca, Prof. Porto and now Prof. Banús, we would not be standing today where we stand now and we would probably not have been able to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the JM Programme.