

Jean Monnet, European Defence and Balance Sheets

Jean Monnet was directly involved in organising the mobilisation of war resources on several occasions.

- In 1916 – The Franco-British *Inter-allied Executives* enabled joint procurement and optimal allocation of resources between allies. In 1918, the Executives were instrumental in mobilising the fleet required to transport US troops to Europe. According to historian J-B Duroselle, ‘Marechal Foch’s flamboyant victory would not have been possible without Jean Monnet’s obscure action’.
- In 1940 - Establishment by Jean Monnet of the *Anglo-French Co-ordinating Committee*, on the same model as the WWI Executives. They provide the impetus to kick-start the US warplane production in support of the allies that will make the Victory Program possible.
- In 1942 – As representant of the *British Supply Council* in Washington, Monnet inspires and provides the methodology for the *Victory Program*, which results in the mobilisation of the US economy in support of the allies. America becomes ‘the arsenal of democracy’, a formula inspired to Roosevelt by Monnet. John Meynard Keynes later said that Jean Monnet’s action in Washington probably shortened the war by a year.
- In 1951 – In anticipation of a possible Russian attack, in a context of severe budgetary constraints of its members, and as the European Defence Community discussions were progressing, Monnet was part of a Three Wisemen NATO committee (together with Averell Harriman (US) and Lord Plowden (UK)), in charge of assessing and allocating the necessary military capacity-building effort amongst members.

Every time, the ‘Balance Sheet of needs and resources’ was at the centre of Jean Monnet’s approach.

‘The balance sheet of needs and resources, which ought to be the starting point of all administration is often the last thing the administrators think of [...]. Balance sheets of this sort have been milestones in my work: the strength of our fleets in 1916, of our air forces in 1940, of Allies and Axis military power in 1942, of the French economy in 1945, and of the six-nation European community in 1950. Each time, the need for appropriate action became obvious once the balance sheet was drawn up’ (Memoirs, p. 126 of English edition).

Monnet’s balance sheets are not an arithmetic exercise. They are a process and an instrument for collective action. They align participating parties, create a shared view of the reality, provide impetus and guidance for joint action. They are at the heart of Monnet’s method of action.

‘At different times, similar situations have produced in me similar reactions, which are naturally expressed in similar ways : “Unity of views and of action”, “overall plan”, the “pooling of resource”. (Memoirs, p. 66 of English edition) .

Balance sheets a tool for ‘convergence in action’. The painful exercise of data collection from countries not used to sharing military information creates the common platform, the trust, and the network that will be required for collective action.

‘The months of work involved in drawing up the balance sheets made civil servants themselves aware of the need to cooperate and exchange information between different Ministries and different countries. So much so that the teams needed for joint action were already formed when the time came for decision. This is the dynamic of the balance sheet ’ (Memoirs, p. 126 of English edition).

Finally, the balance sheets exercise focuses on what is *necessary* and cannot be limited to what seems *possible*, which is central to Monnet’s ‘philosophy of action’. It implies that a clear and precise agreement on the shared final objective is an absolute precondition for success.

‘The philosophy of action which concentrates on what is necessary is more realistic than one that takes account only of what is possible’ (Memoirs, p. 174 of English edition).