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Critical Perspectives on a Founding Myth: Jean Monnet and the European Construction

Ruxandra Iordache¹

Abstract. Monnet's role in the post-war organization of (Western) Europe is undeniable: the first European community established a regional organization of several Western European states and also constituted the starting point for a new social reality, with its own dynamics, which gave rise to extensive academic debates. The latter are inevitably also debates about Monnet's personality and form, we consider, by themselves a social universe, a field in the sociological sense. In this field we can glimpse power relations meant to put both Monnet's personality and the European construction in one light or another. In order to identify some fixed elements in this immense process of knowledge, we have cut out from the academic literature accessed a series of explanatory motifs that put Monnet's personality in a variety of perspectives.

Keywords: Jean Monnet; European Project; academic perspectives on Monnet; sociology of academic literature.

1. Introduction

The academic debate on the European Union generated a big amount of specific literature, aiming to explain such a complex process. One of the key of understanding it is the focus on central figures of this process' start and development, in the post-II World War Époque. Jean Monnet is one of these central figures. We find interesting the manner in which this rich and complex literature can articulate itself a specific field, developing landmarks of interpretation and explanation related to the contribution of Monnet and to the founding father portrait he is associated to. How the critical literature constructs the image of Monnet? Which are the main "labels" that contribute to this image? We consider that these labels function as recurrent motifs having a particular dynamic within the academic field.

2. Critical Perspectives on Jean Monnet: the Academic Debate

2.1. Methodological Approach

We understand by motifs descriptive/explanatory elements used in the academic discourse about Monnet, and from which we can recompose a multi-faceted image of the way in which this personality

¹ PhD Researcher III, Institute of Political Science and International Relations Ion I.C. Brătianu, Address: Iuliu Maniu Boulevard 1-3, Corpus A, Floor 7, Sector 6, Bucharest, Romania, Corresponding author: ruxandra.iordache77@gmail.com.



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is received in academic environments. Of course, the cutting out of such motifs is first of all a didactic and simplistic classification. The reasons themselves, taken independently, may seem simplifying and reductive. They are valuable through the connection and interpenetration between them, but their separate presentation has the advantage of bringing to light the whole palette of conceptions, interpretations, images, arguments generated by Monnet's personality and his contribution to the construction of a certain social order. These motifs make up a field, in this case a field of academic knowledge, in the conceptual sense taken from Pierre Bourdieu.

As for the substance/content of ideas themselves of these motifs, we can anchor such an approach in the area of sociology of literature, adopting the methodological position expressed by Henri Zalamansky in an article entitled *The Study of Contents. Fundamental Stage of a Sociology of Contemporary Literature*, contribution to the volume coordinated by Robert Escarpit, *Literary and Social*, an anthology of texts, published in Romania in 1970 by Univers Publishing House (Zalamansky, 1970, 116-125). The field of sociology of literature, whose necessary composition was talked about in the 1970s with reference to older references, is built around the principle of the existence of an intimate interpenetration between the literary and the social, a source of prolific analyses, projects and methodological programs. Of course, this sociology of literature had in mind above all the analysis of fictional works of greater or lesser artistic and aesthetic value, starting from the premise of the two-way relationship between creation and society. In the study we propose, the analyzed literature does not belong to the category of fiction, but the premise of the two-way relationship between intellectual creation and the social universe in which it is generated is preserved. Henri Zalamansky proposes an approach focused on "determining the ideological content of a set of works from a given era (primarily from our era)" (Zalamansky, 1970, 116-125). It is an attempt at sociology of contents, a kind of sociology of themes, according to a classification previously proposed by A. Memmi in the study *Sociology of Literature in the Textbook of Sociology* coordinated by Gurvich in 1960. We take over the intention announced by Zalamansky to inventory contents of the literature of the contemporary era, in order to arrive at a classification of them and at possible conclusions from such a classification; to this intention we bring the clarification adapted to the present case that we will investigate a type of literature that does not fall into the category of fiction, but into the category of academic writings focused on a period in the recent history of Europe and on a personality who is recognized as having an important contribution to the development of the European construction process.

The inventory of these motifs that we find in the academic literature dedicated to Monnet and the European construction is intended to be more than a thematic ordering approach; such motifs, recovered from a body of work, can be grouped according to four criteria: elements of Monnet's personal biography/social status; its method of action in the sphere of public affairs; Monnet, the thinker; European construction. These reasons, separated transversally by a criterion of negative or positive assessment of Monnet, articulate a field of knowledge within which we find arguments that appear recurrently in the subject's literature.

Interesting is the way in which these motifs are repeated, complemented or contradicted, the extent to which they seek to fix or fix themselves in theoretical elements, to synthesize milestones for an attempt to explain the profile of a life and actions and, at the same time, to touch on sensitive issues in the evolution of communities. In principle, in the academic and biographical writings about Monnet, two major directions are pursued, with reference to the criteria outlined above, about which we anticipate by saying that although they are intended to be or appear to be at first sight irreconcilable, in reality they are in a relationship of interdependence, because, simplistically speaking, it is impossible to conceive a favorable and appreciative literature towards a personality without having its critical counterpart,

destabilizing at times. We could say that in this regard the tension between revealing the complexity of a historical-social context and of one of the personalities of the time and the need, perhaps, to identify a useful authorship, even in the sense of contesting it, for one of the great institutional achievements of the international life of the twentieth century: the European community. It is interesting, we believe, to observe to what extent in the construction of the discourse on Monnet, with its favorite themes and motifs, the Monnet-European Community relationship seems to be reversed, in the sense that the evolution of the latter offers, in its stages, post-Communist perspectives for an interpretation of Monnet's actions. In other words, as if the discourse about a past fact is configured according to its present form; as an example, the issue of the lack of legitimacy and democracy that the European Union is constantly diagnosed with is considered to have original, primary roots, since the European construct is from the very beginning an elitist one, the result of the efforts of some leaders who related in a closed-circuit network, far from the adhesion and knowledge of the public. Monnet would himself be one of these privileged few "responsible" for this deficiency of the community.

What is the function of these motifs? Some of them have become commonplaces, obligatory parts of consecrated official speeches, such as those of the founding father type; others try to break out of this pattern, offering an alternative and critical image of Monnet. On the one hand, they articulate a positive and appreciative discourse, sometimes propagandistic, sometimes cemented with theoretical contributions meant to consolidate it, not just to make it better known or more disseminated. On the other hand, they become fulcrum points for critical approaches that break down point by point one of the key European figures of the twentieth century.

Within the limits of this study, we will focus on some of the reasons why the academic literature critically relates to Monnet as the founder, real or constructed, of the European project.

2.2. Jean Monnet in the Light of Three Explanatory Motifs

The motif of the illustrious unknown

The father of Europe, an unknown? asks Georges Bossuat (Bossuat, 1999), an eminent specialist on Monnet. This component of the discourse on Monnet is an integral part of the argument regarding the profoundly elitist character of the European project: both admirers and detractors evoke it, either as a pretext for a necessary recovery and explanation to the general public of Monnet's personality and contribution, or as an additional reason to explain, with the distance of decades that have passed since the "founder" year 1950, the shortcomings of a democratic deficit from which the European Union suffers without remedy. A forgotten character or known only to those of his generation and to the initiated (Kaspi, 1986: 67) an admirer of Monnet and disciple of Jean Baptiste Duroselle under whose guidance he participated in the project of writing a biography of Monnet. Placed in the proximity of political leaders without being a politician himself, Monnet remains far from the knowledge/interest of the common people: "... Monnet's message is addressed to people of power. It expresses itself through resolutions, negotiations, proposals... Jean Monnet did not know how to address the crowds.... In a word, he was an admirable manipulator of politicians, but not a communicator. Or, in a democracy, more than in any other regime, you have to know how to address the crowds.... If the European idea no longer arouses enthusiasm.... Isn't it because the explanations didn't reach the public opinion? On the other hand, it is much easier to stimulate national egoism or to defend particular interests. It is more difficult to define and then to make the general interest triumph and a fortiori European." (Kaspi, 1986, 72-73)

Some data, collected relatively recently, illustrate this lack of knowledge at the level of the general public: “In a survey conducted at the beginning of 2003 on the characters representing European identity, neither Jean Monnet nor Robert Schuman appears; Both seem to suffer from a lack of recognition, since in none of the countries where the survey was conducted do they exceed 1% of the responses. For the current generation, they are unknown, or almost.” (Roth, 2008, 554) This lack of knowledge is valid, at the level of public opinion, especially on the European continent, where Monnet is present through the myth of the founding father in the debates on European integration between the ruling and/or academic elites, but he lacks, inversely proportionally, a real “public anchoring”. On the other hand, Marc Joly points out, across the ocean, in the United States, Monnet is among the 100 outstanding personalities of the twentieth century, in a ranking compiled by the *Times* magazine. (Joly, 2007, 105)

As far as the academic field is concerned, the literature devoted to Monnet, in the form of biographies, studies, documents, is rich, the connection with the process of European integration being the reason for the enormous attention given to this personality. In this plan, Monnet is not unknown. The writings about his life and especially his career sum up a huge amount of information, on an impressive number of pages. However, according to some opinions, he suffers from a certain mannerism: he presents in broad strokes the aspects of his life and repeatedly evokes aspects of his career, interpreting them in a double perspective: on the one hand as key moments in the European construction; on the other hand, as stages of life that necessarily prepare and converge towards Monnet’s personal mission: “Books devoted to the construction of Europe never fail to mention his status as the inspirer of the Schuman Declaration of 1950 and his work at the head of the Action Committee for the United States of Europe. Otherwise, we are entitled, most of the time, to generalities that evoke his double apprenticeship as an actor of international institutions and a cosmopolitan banker – an apprenticeship that finds its meaning, its ultimate meaning, only because Monnet would have extracted from it an institutional method capable of fulfilling an old dream of humanity: the achievement of the unity of Europe”. (Joly, 2007, 25)

In fact, at this point the discussion about Jean Monnet and the way in which an entire academic research is built around his personality acquires a certain ideological charge, favorable or critical towards Monnet and his authorship in terms of European construction. From here, to speak of Monnet as the illustrious unknown shows us to what extent knowledge about this character is far from neutral.

The motif of the founding myth and the elitist project

The European construction has thus built a history, in which Monnet’s name is associated with the 0 moment. An “emblematic but atypical figure” (Cohen, 1998, 645-663), who, unlike other previous thinkers and politicians, transforms the abstract ideal of a European project into concrete realization. A formulation of this type fits into a pattern that comes with a chronology that is intended to be clear and without difficulties of a process that, for the general understanding, was much more complicated and needed such simplification. In this logic, if personalities such as Schuman, Spaak and Spinelli also had a special role in community development, and can legitimately claim to be included among the founding fathers, the role of catalyst and initiator would instead be attributed to Jean Monnet. A catalytic role that is expressed in the formula of a certainty regarding Monnet’s founding vision of Europe: such “essential” ideas “were clearly born of the mind of Monnet and his friends” (Mayne, 1967, 367), and “the treaties established in Rome, which laid the foundations of the European Economic Community and the Euratom, were clearly the progeny of Monnet and his friends.” (Mayne, 1967, 367)

In the academic literature, however, we find approaches that put such a discourse in a different light, meant to offer the public a “reference story”. Marc Joly proposes an unveiling of the process by which

the Monnet myth is articulated at the level of the European elites. Such an unveiling aims to show that although Monnet was an exceptional man, with an innovative and unusual thinking, with a surprising ability to “understand the socio-historical specificity of the dynamics of the West” (Joly, 2007, 11-12, 28), the unique paternity over the European construction is confusingly attributed to him, he has only a legitimizing function for the successor elites and does not constitute a historical truth. Monnet is not the “father of Europe” (Joly, 2007, 111), but he is, instead, the nucleus around which a new type of ideology is articulated, which takes the place of national ideologies and founds the so-called “power-Europe”. A paradox, this author points out, given the rational perspective that Monnet preferred, under the exhortation that individuals/citizens forget about the nationalist passion, the dogma of national sovereignty, and find the “common interest” (Joly, 2007, 112).

In such approaches that dismantle Monnet’s central role, recurring themes are used in the critical discussion about the European construction. Among these, the distance from the people – the European people, if it can be said that it exists – occupies a privileged place, especially when the European Commission, with its integrating and supranational vocation, or the European Parliament, the institution directly elected by European citizens, should represent valid identification points for them. Various indicators, such as participation in the European Parliament elections, indicate that a European identity has not crystallized and that the European institutions retain their elitist character: “The EU is a configuration of interdependent elites (high representatives of states, European parliamentarians, European parliamentarians, commissioners in Brussels, economic elites, etc.), in rivalry, of course, and coming from different political systems, but nevertheless united by the common exercise of de facto sovereignty (n.m.) and by the concern to legitimize their power, power-Europe globally.” (Joly, 2007, 11-12, 28) European citizens remain far from this institutional sphere in which decisions are made that nevertheless affect their existence in the most direct way. Instead, they are exposed to various constructed discourses, meant to legitimize and base such an arrangement on so-called original myths: the Monnet myth – a myth of the demiurge and of power – Europe par excellence – is part of this hall of fame that aims to give a sacred but also concrete, personalized aura to the European construct. The myth tells us, in Marc Joly’s opinion, the following: “in order to facilitate peace, Monnet had the idea of preparing, in the greatest secrecy, a project inviting France and Germany to pool their coal and steel production under the aegis of a High Authority” (Joly, 2007, 66).

This Monnet – who held important positions, of course, such as that of member of the French Committee of National Liberation in Algiers, commissioner of the Modernization Plan¹, president of the High Authority of the ECSC, president of the Action Committee for the United States of Europe, without these being his main vector of influence – “never sought the anointing of universal suffrage” (Chevènement, 2006, 11).

The supranational elitist construction that systematically forges this myth uses specific epithets for this purpose: Monnet is inspiring, founder, civilizer, visionary. “In the geometric place of any history regarding the construction of Europe is thus raised the emblematic figure of the one who is generally considered as the father of Europe”, Antonin Cohen (Cohen, 2007, 14-29) tells us in an article that analyzes the way in which a “story about origins” is socially constructed.

Such epithets are circulated both in the specialized literature that is part of the pro- camp, and in most of the speeches displayed on official channels of the EU institutions. With the caveat, however, that the

¹ The post-war Modernization Plan of France, started in 1946, an independent structure of ministries, directly subordinated to the Prime Minister, which Monnet would lead until 1954.

nickname *Inspirator* has a less favorable source for Monnet: it was attributed to Charles de Gaulle¹, with the irony inherent in the complicated relationship that united and separated them alike. They are generally intertwined in a type of discourse that does not present surprising elements as a whole, because it is part of a pattern that produces a relatively stable list of personal qualities to which an entire career is necessarily and unequivocally linked, in a well-weighed dosage in which both successes and failures are identified/explained. On the other hand, the opposite discourse brings to the fore a series of interesting elements.

Thus, Marc Joly evokes elements that would be, in his opinion, indications that the “power-Europe” discourse about Monnet builds a myth (Joly, 2007, 31-33) that it needs: the story about Monnet is a history of founding times; it is a collective representation that is built on and to confirm the exceptional character of a “great man”; It presents a set of formulas, rites, which create a coherent and continuous image of the man in question and his achievements, making possible a so-called “detachment from reality” (Joly, 2007, 32). De Gaulle also spoke of invented myths in reference to Monnet’s projects – such as the Franco-British union in June 1940, but also that of the European Community (de Gaulle, *apud* Amouroux, 1990, 365).

The founding myth of Monnet brings together several vectors. The conspiracy vector is present, with a positive connotation, highlighted by moments such as the secrecy kept in a very small circle before the public utterance of the Schuman Declaration². Also present is the vector of the savior, the providential man who came up with a unique solution to a common problem – in this case the peaceful future of (Western) Europe. We find the vector that bears the idyllic image of a golden age – the era of the founders, the era of the beginning. Last but not least, it is a vector carrying the ideal of unity to which every human community – in this case European – aspires, expressed through the formula of the United States of Europe. In this formula, Monnet becomes the mythical character who “changed the course of history”: “This is the Monnet myth: the European construction would not have been possible without the external constraint represented by Jean Monnet for a quarter of a century” (Joly, 2007, 55) and without that *maieutics* (Joly, 2007, 67) through which Monnet manages to convince states of the common interest and to converge towards it. In general, the myth has the function of articulating a linear sequence of facts at the end of which there is a meaningful denouement and can be explained exactly by virtue of this perfect linearity of the myth. This is also the case of the Monnet myth, which integrates the different stages and experiences of this personality, and their listing, which is no longer at all random and meaningless, is presented as necessarily leading to his great achievements, the Schuman Declaration and the ECSC in the first place.

The focus is on the action of an individual: he understands and takes into account the importance of the context – in which the interests of the USA intervene to encourage a united/unitary Western Europe with the entire Western front against the USSR and to solve, as a package, the German question, through the reintegration of West Germany into the international community – and makes a gesture, a founding act, implementing an idea that he would have had before anyone else. This is the message conveyed by publicly recognized monuments such as the memorial plaque in the Pantheon (Cohen, 2007, 14-29), where Monnet’s remains were transferred in 1988.

Marc Joly points out by way of example, Monnet’s documented reluctance to create the common market – in favor of the atomic energy community – is twisted and changes its meaning: Monnet would have

¹ Monnet records this episode in his *Memoirs*, attenuating its ironic charge.

² The literature of the subject explains that this speech was so well protected from the attention of a wider circle of politicians and the media, that at the time of its utterance it was not immortalized with press means – photos or notes by the journalists present; The photographs that exist as a testimony of this moment are reconstructions, of the directors after that moment.

been the supporter and main author of the common market: “the figure of Jean Monnet... is the only one that can be validly invoked in support of each stage of the European integration process” (Joly, 2007: 39). In reality, Christian Pineau reveals: “... Jean Monnet’s action is not, however, as positive as the most determined European fundamentalists would like. He did not vary much in his opinions and always envisaged sectoral Europe becoming its champion in Messina” (Rimbaud, 1991, 194-195). This twisting of reality in the sense suggested by the necessary consistency of the myth makes the role of the French Foreign Minister Christian Pineau forgotten, although his contribution to this endeavor was crucial despite Monnet’s opposition (Joly, 2007, 39). As François Roth said in the biography of Robert Schuman – another little-known “founding father” – “posterity is always selective” (Roth, 2008, 558).

Marc Joly speaks of a success in the dissemination of the Monnet myth, but it was not a mass success: although the Monnet-Europe association has become a cliché, Monnet remains little known to the general public. After all, the Monnet myth is itself a horizontal construct, addressed to elites. Its resonance at the level of common knowledge is minimal, because its function is the cohesion of the elites, “inseparable from the constitution of a power, from the progressive establishment of an elitist configuration” (Joly, 2007, 34) and not the articulation of a connection between elites and citizens. In other words, the Monnet myth does not reduce the distance between the European institutions and the citizens: Monnet remains for the latter the illustrious unknown like a heraldic insignia whose meaning and consistency have been lost.

On the contrary, Antonin Cohen states that in fact this founding myth was built by Jean Monnet’s immediate entourage, from where it was then, through a long process of dissemination in the media carried out between 1960 and 1990, universalized, reaching the point of imposing itself on the knowledge of the general public. A number of institutional actors mobilized in this regard, in order to make May 9, 1950 the founding act of a united Europe, and so that this discourse would not remain in the small circle of Monnet’s collaborators. In an approach that intersects with the sociology of the literary fact, Cohen describes and understands this process in terms of a process of literary production, which is mobilized and monopolized by people in key positions.

Among them, François Fontaine, one of Monnet’s close friends, is said to have launched in a press article published in *Le Monde* in 1960, referring to the declaration of May 9, 1950, expressions such as: “absolute beginning”, “European nebula”, “hard core”, “successful legal plot” of “a few people”, “the birth of Europe”; The reference event thus acquires the specific dimensions of a founding myth, and is thus promoted to the public’s knowledge. In the same period, François Fontaine’s son, Pascal Fontaine, (re)produced “this story of origins” on a much larger scale, having access to the political communication services of the European institutions, services created by his father himself. (Cohen, 2007, 15) We also mention here that it was François Fontaine and Pascal Fontaine who, in addition to having contributed to the dissemination of the narrative on the origin of community construction, assisted Monnet in the effort to write his *Memoirs*, towards the end of his life. A collective effort that is intended, says Cohen, to give “scientific credit” to the myth about origins, after it has long been popularized by the media of the time (Cohen, 2007, 20). This collaboration raised doubts about the authenticity of the content of these autobiographical writings, all the more so since it is known that Monnet himself did not make regular daily notes on his work and impressions and that he confessed his pragmatic spirit, too little inclined towards reflection and abstraction. It was not until 1968, according to his own statements in his memoirs, that Monnet would have begun to be concerned with the recovery and written recording of the information gathered throughout his life and career.

Cohen also emphasizes the ordering of Monnet's actions, which, as Marc Joly also stated, must converge towards that moment 0 for European construction, the date of May 9, 1950; an entire symbolic edifice was built to impose this date on the collective memory, and, from here, to create a "logical order (s.n.) for what is chronological in Jean Monnet's life", "stages in the sequence of his activities, especially through the memoranda left to posterity as worthy of being recorded by history, therefore pre-constructed, somehow, for this purpose"(Cohen, 2007, 16-20).

Cohen quotes as an example from the voluminous biography of Monnet written by Eric Roussel¹, a work that he places in the conventional pattern of writings about Monnet: in this biographical narrative a lineage is constructed according to which the European communities have their first origin in the coal and steel community, which, in turn, resulted from Monnet's action during the world wars and then in the idea expressed in August 1943 through the famous letter from Algiers (Roussel, 1996, 383), considered to be the general framework for European construction starting with 1950. Even if the idea he presented to de Gaulle, in October 1943, was to "create a European industrial country formed more precisely by the Ruhr, the Saar, the Rhineland, Luxembourg, whose steel production will be exploited for the benefit of the whole of Europe by the European nations themselves", and the route to that first community is complicated, the lineage is nevertheless traced, with a contoured and stable succession of stages his career, since the first steps towards studying this personality, undertaken under Duroselle's guidance starting in the 1960s. Such a "laying out", says Cohen, taking up an argument concerning the origin of the 1958 constitution and the Fifth Republic (Gaïti, 1998, 53), also has the effect of making other competing attempts that aimed, unlike Monnet's "plan", to establish a market framed by constitutionally defined and directly elected political institutions, concerned with objectives such as the full employment of the workforce or the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms (Cohen, 2007, 19), fall into oblivion. The influence of the 1930s – the first Vichy and the Uriage cadre school –, the economic or ideological initiatives of the first post-war years, such as the Marshall Plan and other forms of American economic support with the objective of achieving a European federation, the Hague Congress, the European Movement or the anti-communist ideological struggle disappear "after the unique and univocal figure of the founding father", together with "their contribution to the possibility of such a European construction." The influence of the 1930s – the first Vichy and the Uriage cadre school –, the economic or ideological initiatives of the first post-war years, such as the Marshall Plan and other forms of American economic support with the objective of achieving a European federation, the Hague Congress, the European Movement or the anti-communist ideological struggle disappear "after the unique and univocal figure of the founding father", along with "their contribution to the possibility of such a European construction." (Cohen, 2007, 28) At the end of this original myth, there are, Cohen shows in consonance with Joly, "groups of interdependent elites, interested from the very beginning in the European construction, which was for them an opportunity to consolidate their institutional positions in their respective fields, political, bureaucratic or academic" (Cohen, 2007, 25).

The elitist character of the European construct constitutes in itself a broad subject of study. We will only specify that, in the current context in which (Western) societies strongly value democracy and adopt equality as its obligatory corollary, words (concepts) such as elitism, elitist, elitist are "laden with negative, even derogatory connotations", provoking aversion: "Nowadays, to qualify a project as elitist means, in most cases, to disqualify it. To treat a person as elitist means to question the legitimacy of his opinion" (Coenen-Huther, 2007, 8). This specification brings into another light the criticism aimed at the European construct and the personalities who have become emblematic for its establishment and

¹ This author is also renowned for a series of biographies of big names in French politics, including de Gaulle, Pompidou, and, coming right up to the present day, Macron.

evolution. Suddenly, the elitism of which the union is accused could be a “refractive vice” that sometimes also comes from an exaggerated search for undifferentiated equality between individuals.

The motif of the Original Responsible

Beyond the disputes regarding the use and success of the “origins story”, we can note that the perhaps strident myth of the “founding father”, the “tutelary figure” of the European construct, has the perverse effect of successfully transferring responsibility for the subsequent evolution of communities primarily to one man. Indeed, as Marc Joly says, the dissemination of the myth that wants to consecrate the “*sui generis* institutional inventiveness of a unique individual” (Joly, 2007, 67) means not only the confirmation of a constructed history: it can attract that personal imputation (Joly, 2007, 31) - which is activated when the reality around which the myth is constructed ends up being the object of sustained criticism.

We will give as an example, in the context of this article, only the arguments regarding the direct responsibility for the distance between citizens and European institutions that would stem from the elitist approach of the “founding fathers”. Indeed, Monnet left in the background, with the exception of brief references to European citizens who would benefit from the order established by the community project, popular support. In his opinion, the latter would develop as a result of the creation of institutions for the European community, being a consequence of their implantation and functioning. If Monnet’s strategy was essentially elitist and focused on obtaining a consensus of the West European national elites of the time, from a wide range of the political spectrum, on the establishment of a supranational institution, some authors consider that it was nevertheless the most practical strategy and with the greatest chances of success in the economic and social conditions of the early 1950s. (Cardozo, 1987, 73)

However, this nuance and circumstantialization does not eliminate the argument that Monnet had an “autocratic” approach: “Such a vision, deliberately alien to any democratic consideration, (which) seems to have emerged directly from the technocratic and planning circles of the non-conformists of the 1930s”. (Loubet del Bayle, 1969)

The responsibility for the elitist nature of his projects would therefore lie in the period when, before getting involved in the European project, Monnet directed the Reconstruction and Modernization Plan (1946-1948). An edifying experience, as one of Monnet’s close collaborators, Pierre Uri, testifies: “There were three of us: Monnet, Hirsch and me... We did the reconstruction, the industrialization plan, stabilization, social policy; we did foreign policy and we ended up doing military policy, because we were the ones who prepared the Lisbon conference that reorganized NATO.” (Uri, *apud* Cohen, 1999: 410) The institution of the plan constitutes, in the opinion of Marc Joly, a forum that allowed “a handful of technocrats to pull all the strings in French politics”, to influence public policies and to impose themselves in a clearly weakened parliamentary regime, revealing “the little consideration they had for parliamentary democracy” (Joly, 2007, 69-70). From here, the author draws a connection with the specifics of the European project started in 1950.

The Schuman Declaration and the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community, truly an institutional innovation of a supranational character, but also technocratic and bureaucratic – a “mission institution” (Joly, 2007, 61), continues the spirit of this important institution which was the plan for the reconstruction and modernization of the French economy. Its composition was well established, as were the objectives strictly related to the industrial sector it governed: increasing production, creating a free market, eliminating customs duties, equalizing working and living conditions for the citizens of the

participating states towards progress. But, behind these economic objectives: “What Monnet wanted was at the same time precise and vague: an institution independent (of states and of any intergovernmental institutional system), composed of a mission staff and charged with a well-defined function; a decision-making power common to France and Germany in the field of coal and steel, but of which history provided no example and whose form was therefore legally undefined.” (Joly, 2007, 65)

Coming to our days, the elitist configuration becomes responsible for the lack of original popular legitimacy of the European Union; the foundation of today’s power-Europe is instead built on the basis of the Monnet myth. This instrumentalization of the myth, Marc Joly shows, only furthers “the structural impossibility of power-Europe to open itself towards an authentic popular legitimacy, that is, a legitimacy other than that conferred by national elites emancipated from national sovereignties” (Joly, 2007, 103), saving it, apparently and unconvincingly for the general public, from the original vacuum of legitimacy. In this key, Marc Joly interprets the founding myth of Monnet, which, through a circular movement, helps the power that circulates it to self-consecrate itself. This game also includes certain gestures of recognition and consecration of the Monnet myth, significant being the transfer of his ashes to the Pantheon, in the gallery of illustrious figures of the French Fatherland, or the awarding for the first time of the title of honorary citizen of Europe.

In contrast, some authors show that these are not constructed myths and criticize the rhetoric behind them. The argument that the so-called founding fathers and their successors “considered it superfluous to adopt specific measures in this sense (of raising awareness of European citizens towards the European construct) is not supported, it is shown; because this education/socialization and, consequently, the emergence of such a feeling indispensable for the achievement of the United States of Europe should, according to them, naturally arise from the process of economic integration”. (Petit, 2008, 59-60)

In fact, the concept of *de facto solidarity*, frequently reiterated in Monnet’s Memoirs, can be deciphered in the sense that the pooling of essentially economic interests according to the community algorithm would automatically lead to a new type of solidarity between individuals, and to an awareness by them of the community construct as a reference point of belonging. This detour through economics towards a political objective, vaguely outlined in the formula of the ideal of the United States of Europe, and through which a feeling that binds people, and not states, would develop, is not sufficiently explained by Monnet. Moreover, none of the allegations with potential theoretical value are the subject of extensive argumentation in Monnet’s writings, a direct reflection after all of the fact that he was not a theorist. However, despite these conceptual imprecisions and Monnet’s partial successes as the first president of the High Authority, his great merit will have been to contribute to “the emergence of a common state of mind, truly focused on the general interest” (Roussel, 1996, 646), as well as to the formation of a category of senior European officials, subsequently involved in the relaunch of community integration through the two treaties of 1957 (EEC and Euratom).

If Monnet’s statements are too succinct on such matters, some authors add a nuance and show that it is excessive to categorically assert a direct/personal responsibility in relation to certain shortcomings of today’s European Union, such as the lack of a real link between citizens and European institutions (elite). The argument that Jean Monnet did not rely on an “automatism” derived from the economic sphere and that he manifested “a disbelief in the automatism of acts and the conviction that, on the contrary, objectives do not achieve themselves and that progress does not go by itself” (Petit, 2008: 59-60) would stem from the emphasis he placed on the need to establish institutions, instances that enshrine rules regarding the conduct of processes and directly target individuals. Institutions change people’s minds, Monnet stated in his Memoirs. He also stated the need to inform and educate national citizens about the community project, so that it does not become an automatic process that takes place above the level of

their existence as individuals and without depending in any way on their participation. Educating individuals on topics related to European construction would be a basis for the argument that the project was not strictly and definitively elitist. Indeed, the way in which citizens are informed and made aware of such processes that directly concern them is perhaps not explained enough by Monnet himself: "...the brilliant leader is the one whom the majority of his fellow citizens follow. It is possible that Jean Monnet did not follow this political wisdom." (Kaspi, 1986, 73)

3. Conclusion

It can be difficult to write about such motifs in a simple inventory in the right key and tone to avoid slipping into one *parti pris* or another. In trying to put them face to face, our goal is to emphasize the value they acquire as tools that give an account of the way in which a process of knowledge is articulated. Due to the impossibility of going through and presenting such a vast literature in its entirety, we limit ourselves to signaling and illustrating with a few arguments the presence of one or another of the motifs, trying to avoid their repetition which sometimes does not bring a significant addition to the construction of our research. At the end of such a journey that reflects the way Monnet is received in the space of academic and biographical writings, the image of this personality emerges in a kaleidoscopic configuration of alternative, rival or competing truths, on which we can question ourselves to the same extent as we do in relation to memoiristic or biographical writings, in the dubious sense present in the famous article signed by Pierre Bourdieu, *L'illusion biographique*, in 1986.

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