



**AMBASSADE  
DE FRANCE  
AUX ÉTATS-UNIS**

*Liberté  
Égalité  
Fraternité*

**French Embassy Statement to the National Capital Memorial Advisory  
Commission  
In Support of S. 3579 and H.R. 6611**

**July 27, 2022**

Dear Mr. Chairman,  
Dear Members of the Commission,

It is a real pleasure and a great honor to testify before you today, in support of S. 3579 and H.R. 6611, legislation that has been introduced in the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress to authorize the installation of a commemorative work in the District of Columbia and its environs in honor of Jean Monnet. I hope you will consider this project positively ahead of the congressional deliberations on the two bills that were introduced earlier this year by a bipartisan, bicameral group of Members of Congress. Let me take this opportunity to thank all of them, and in particular Senator Chris Coons of Delaware, Congressman Bill Keating of Massachusetts, Congressman Bob Latta of Ohio, and Congressman Jim Costa of California, for taking the time to address your Commission in support of this legislation, as well.

Let me start by underlining that I sincerely respect your Commission's work and purpose. I understand that one of your guiding principles, as listed in the Commemorative Works Act of 1986 is to "*preserve the integrity of the comprehensive design of the L'Enfant and McMillan plans for the Nation's Capital*". As the Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of France in the United States, I can assure you that I share this noble goal of preserving the vision of my fellow countryman, Pierre L'Enfant, for this beautiful city. Having lived in Washington, DC, for the past two years, I value the importance of safeguarding the cohesiveness and integrity of the Nation's Capital.

However, today, it is not Pierre L'Enfant who brings me to testify before you, but another great Frenchman, who also made a lasting impact in both American and transatlantic history. Indeed, Jean Monnet, also known as the "Father of the Europe," was not only the initiator of what would become, years later, the European Union, but he was also a very important political player in Washington during and after the Second World War.

## **A friend of America marked by its unspoiled wilderness, protected by the National Park Service**

From his work as Deputy Secretary General of the League of Nations after the First World War to his role as President of the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community in the 1950's, Jean Monnet lived a very well fulfilled life that I will not have time to describe for you today. So let me focus on the time he spent here, in the United States. Actually, he had visited the U.S. many times before the war and America had a lasting impact on him. When he first visited the "New World" as he called it, in 1906, at the age of only 17, he was profoundly marked by the authenticity and pragmatism of the American people. He never ceased to admire it and it was precisely the first characteristic he noticed in President Roosevelt. But above all, he was deeply impressed by America's unspoiled wilderness, protected by the National Park Service, where he found this same feeling of authenticity. Throughout his career, Jean Monnet became a close friend to many prominent Americans, from John Foster Dulles, whom he first met during the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, to FDR's closest advisor Harry Hopkins, among many others. Between 1940 and 1945, he lived in Washington, DC. I believe those years are essential to assess both the significance and the lasting impact of Jean Monnet's "American life," and the primary reason behind the project to establish a commemorative work in his honor.

## **A DC resident, who played a significant role in the U.S. "Victory Program" during WWII**

Jean Monnet arrived in Washington in August 1940, only a few weeks after the fall of France. Until then, he had been working as the Chair of the "Franco-British Coordination Committee," which aimed at jointly organizing the military purchases of France and the United Kingdom at the beginning of the Second World War. After the capitulation of the Vichy Government, he was sent to United States by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to continue this work, this time as Vice-Chair of the "British Purchasing Commission," whose purpose was to secure delivery of armaments for the British military from North America.

He settled in a house located at 2415 Foxhall Road NW. Today, this house sits, very symbolically, between the French and German Embassies near Georgetown. At that time, Jean Monnet worked from an office of the British Mission at the Willard Hotel. As you may know, a historical marker was installed on the hotel's façade at the request of the "Jean Monnet Council" in 1997. In his memoirs, Jean Monnet makes several mentions of his life on Foxhall Road, where he would invite his American friends, including Justice Felix Frankfurter whom had been appointed to the Supreme Court a few months before. This house played a significant role in Jean Monnet's experience of Washington – but I will get back to this.

So, when Jean Monnet arrived in Washington, Nazi troops were occupying Paris. At that time, partly due to the trauma left by the brutality of World War I, and to the strength of both isolationist and pacifist movements in America, the United States remained officially neutral in this war. Jean Monnet, himself, profoundly marked by his own experience during and after the First World War when he worked to coordinate the war efforts of France and Britain, was then set on a mission: securing a commitment from the Roosevelt administration to take a side and to get the United States' support to win against Nazi Germany. Indeed, just as he was convinced that European countries needed to coordinate

their war efforts to defeat Hitler, he knew that all of this was dependent of the United States taking a leading role in this endeavor against tyranny and hatred.

Through his friendship with key actors in the U.S. administration, Jean Monnet encouraged President Roosevelt to take a stand. In his memoirs, he tells the story that, during a conversation with Justice Frankfurter, he made the argument that the United States needed to supply more weapons to European countries and actually coined the phrase "Arsenal for Democracy." This now greatly famous expression was used by President Roosevelt in his radio broadcast address on December 29, 1940 – arguing for a more forceful, albeit indirect, involvement in the war.

This shift in policy resulted in the adoption by Congress of the Lend Lease Act of 1941. A few months later, it was even deepened after the tragic attack on Pearl Harbor, which precipitated the official entry of the United States in the world conflict. In the following months, Jean Monnet played a very active role advocating for a massive industrial endeavor aimed at building President Roosevelt's "Victory Program" that would eventually lead to the military victory on the battlefield and the liberation of Europe.

To illustrate the significance of Jean Monnet's role, let me cite the words of American economist John Maynard Keynes, who was then a close advisor to President Roosevelt: *"When the United States was at war, Roosevelt was presented with a plan to build airplanes that every American technician found to be miraculous or far too much. Monnet was the only one who dared to think it was not enough. The President rallied to his views. He then imposed on the American nation an effort which, at first, seemed impossible, but which was, in the end, completely accomplished. This key decision has probably shortened the duration of the war by a year."*

Through his persistence and ability to convince his interlocutor, he proved that the United States could also benefit from its determination to support its allies around the world. When we think about this particular aspect of Jean Monnet's legacy, how can we not think about current events and the robust support that the United States – along with its European partners – has given to Ukraine to defend itself against Russian aggression. Two months after the beginning of the war, Congress adopted a new Lend-Lease program to support Ukraine's military needs.

### **A man of peace, promoting European integration and strong transatlantic ties after the war**

However, Jean Monnet must also be remembered as a man of peace. Indeed, he dedicated his work after World War II to establishing a lasting peace in Europe. His idea was to pool together the steel and coal industries of the formerly warring powers, including France and Germany, to create the conditions favorable to what he envisioned as the European Federation. Several decades later, his project partly became a reality. If the European Union is not, strictly speaking, a federation as the United States is, it is the result of the European integration process originally set in motion by Jean Monnet after the war.

### **An avid hiker who envisioned a united Europe during his daily strolls in Rock Creek Park**

Here again, Jean Monnet's life in the United States, and particularly in Washington, played a significant role. It is something less known about his career: Jean Monnet was an avid hiker. Every morning, he used to walk for a couple of hours in Rock Creek Park, which was directly accessible from the backyard of his red brick house on Foxhall Road. It was a true haven for him. He fondly called it "mon parc," "his park". In his memoirs, he described Rock Creek Park as follows: "It is the natural backdrop to my thinking: that is my form of poetry". In addition to all he managed to accomplish during his stay in Washington and the lasting significance of his legacy, it is also this aspect, more poetic but nonetheless symbolic, of his life that the Embassy of France would like to commemorate through the installation of a memorial in his honor.

The idea of this memorial comes, from a true, and inspiring story. All this life, Jean Monnet was a man of big dreams and bold proposals. He used to say to his staff : "We have no more ideas to make the world a better place? Let's take a walk". And, therefore, it was there, in the woods and along the paths of Rock Creek Park, that Jean Monnet's whole life experience and daily, intimate contact with American democracy were shaped. It was there that he thought about post-war Europe, about the project that should be built to avoid the horrors of wars for generations to come. It was there in Rock Creek National Park that the seeds – conceptual, political, and institutional – of what has become since then the European project, a project between democratic nations, with no such equivalent in the world, were imagined, sown, and conceived.

### **An ardent believer in Democracy whose vision of transatlantic partnership still resonates today**

All his life, Jean Monnet fought for the cause of democracy. As he eloquently underlined in his memoirs, recalling a conversation with his American friends, he had been shocked by the violence of Nazism against the Jews after the so-called "Night of Broken Glass" in November 1938 during which the Nazi paramilitary organized pogroms against the Jewish population in Germany, and he got a very early, clear understanding that such a regime would go to war and try to impose its dominance over the world. All his life, he thought about how to make democracy stronger against economic crises, fears in society, and threats of hostile, authoritarian regimes. And he did so in a permanent, thriving, inspiring conversation with his friends in the U.S., including U.S. Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy after the war. In that sense, the life and ideas of Jean Monnet are very contemporary: How to build, nurture, and develop a shared conversation between democracies. And, if we share some of the same challenges, how should we think and work together to address them?

Thank you for your attention.

Aurélie BONAL  
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