The architects and engineers of today's Europe

In the last 50 years Europe has undergone dramatic changes. Once little more than a synonym for a purely geographical entity and a stage for bloody wars, most of the continent now has a common political identity, with citizens living in peace, able to travel without passports and shop where they like, mostly using the same currency. What is more, EU citizens have the right to live, work and study in any member state, with most of their professional qualifications recognised almost anywhere they are.

It's a far cry from the Europe of national jealousies and power struggles, of grim border guards, of customs controls and impenetrable rules on work and residence permits. How did all this come about?

The simple answer is that the people of Europe wanted it to happen. But it would be more accurate to say that institutions were created to bring it about. The European Parliament was set up to give the people of Europe a voice. Representing national governments, the Council of the European Union was created to take decisions; together with Parliament, it is responsible for passing EU laws. To make sure that decisions are thoroughly prepared and properly implemented, an executive organ, the European Commission, was set up. Lastly, the European Court of Justice was created to ensure that EU law is applied correctly and consistently throughout the EU.

These bodies have shaped and continue to shape Europe. Thanks to them, for example, holiday-makers anywhere in Europe now pay reduced roaming charges when phoning home on their mobiles. Their competition policy has greatly extended the range of products and services on offer, cutting prices in the process. There are many areas where Europe, working together, can make real progress for all. The EU institutions, in which representatives of 27 member states meet to design, debate and decide, are constantly developing the European Union. They are the architects and engineers of today's Europe, and tomorrow's too.