

## Reactions in the Benelux countries

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## Reactions in the Benelux countries

Reactions to the Schuman Plan in official circles were lukewarm in the Benelux countries since Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg had already learnt, to their cost, the difficulties that the creation of an economic union could bring in its wake. They also feared that the High Authority would be invested with too many discretionary powers. Nevertheless, they supported the idea of a plan for the sector and were particularly convinced of the merits of its political objectives, even if they were traditionally wary of Franco-German hegemony.

The Netherlands Government, relatively unaffected by the problems facing the coal and steel heavy industries, agreed to the Plan while maintaining the right to withdraw if it found that the supranational aspect had become, in its view, unworkable.

Business circles in Belgium were divided on the issue. Although the steel companies that had modernised their plants tended to welcome the Plan, the owners of the coal mines in Wallonia were above all worried about central planning by the High Authority and about international competition, since their mines were proving to be less and less economically viable. They also feared an end to the monopolistic protection of the mines afforded by the State in order to keep them running artificially. The Government, however, was pleased to find a European programme that would allow it to close down loss-making mining companies that it knew were bound to disappear anyway.

Luxembourg generally supported the Schuman Plan. The steel industry accounted for almost 90 % of its exports, and the country welcomed a Plan that could open up large export markets. The country had all the more need for new markets given that wage levels were higher than in neighbouring countries, a factor which adversely affected profitability. Professional associations did express some concerns about the High Authority, which they considered too powerful, but they nevertheless resigned themselves to going along with the Plan.