

'France's proposal – a political sensation' from the Süddeutsche Zeitung (11 May 1950)

Caption: On 11 May 1950, the German daily newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung considers the reactions of German politicians and economists towards the French plans for a coal and steel pool in Western Europe.

Source: Süddeutsche Zeitung. Münchner neueste Nachrichten für Politik, Kultur, Wirtschaft und Sport. Hrsg. Friedmann, Werner ; Goldschagg, Edmund ; Schöningh, Dr. Franz Josef; Schwingenstein, August ; Herausgeber Friedmann, Werner. 11.05.1950, Nr. 108; 6. Jg. München: Süddeutscher Verlag. "Frankreichs Angebot - eine politische Sensation", auteur:hd. , p. 1.

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France's proposal — a political sensation

German steel industry approves amalgamation with its French counterpart on the basis of equal rights. Uncomfortable surprise for Britain. Effects on the Conference of Foreign Ministers.

(SZ) The announcement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Robert Schuman, that his government was proposing that all French and German iron and coal production should be controlled by a joint Franco-German authority was described yesterday in almost all European capitals as the biggest political sensation in months. As we reported in some of yesterday's editions, Schuman's plan was described by Chancellor Adenauer as a 'generous step on the part of France and its Minister for Foreign Affairs'. Adenauer pointed out, however, that the plan, which came as a complete surprise for Britain in particular, had not previously been discussed by France and Germany. He added that his government's recommendation that the Bundestag should agree to join the Council of Europe was unconnected with the French move.

Düsseldorf (from our own correspondent)

The French Foreign Minister's surprise proposal to combine the steelworks of the Ruhr and Lorraine in a close-knit association has made a profound impression on the West German steel industry. It has been pointed out that the proposal by Karl Arnold, Minister-President of North-Rhine Westphalia, that Western European heavy industry should be integrated for the sake of improved performance, is now manifestly considered reasonable on the French side too.

It is, however, also felt in the Ruhr that equal status for the German steel industry would have to be re-established before the French proposal could be implemented. Above all the one-sided and demeaning provisions of the Ruhr Statute would have to be amended. Apart from that, an increase in the German steel quota would be the most important prerequisite for implementation of the proposal.

Representatives of several large German steelworks told us that they would be delighted to work closely with French heavy industry. There are numerous points of convergence, they said, but the current situation should on no account be the starting point; in other words, a French steel industry boosted greatly in capacity by the Monnet Plan on the one hand, and a German industry considerably weakened by dismantling and output restrictions on the other, should not be the point of departure for a new alliance. France, they said, should under no circumstances be allowed to use the Schuman Plan to secure a German market for its surplus steel production.

The German steel industry is also overwhelmingly in favour of a reasonable arrangement, perhaps an international steel cartel. A well-known steel industry manager was particularly keen to point out to us that the internal profitability structures of steel and sheet metal concerns in the two countries are still very different. The goal should be, by means of equal starting conditions, to work towards fair competition and, better still, towards mutually beneficial collaboration. If the French plan were to be based on those grounds, he said, it could count on the full support of the Ruhr steelworks. It is expected that leading representatives of the West German steel industry will respond officially to the French proposal in the next few days.

Bonn (SZ)

The French initiative has generally been welcomed in German parliamentary circles. The leader of the CDU/CSU group in the Bundestag, Heinrich von Brentano, spoke in favour of immediate negotiations between the two governments on implementation of the Schuman Plan. The Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB) is of the opinion that the planned amalgamation of iron and steel production should not preempt any decisions concerning ownership of West German basic industries.

Narrow majority for Schuman

Paris (AP)

The proposal by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Robert Schuman, to amalgamate the French and German coal and steel industries was passed on Wednesday, by 18 votes to 17, by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the French National Assembly.

Belgian Trade and Industry Minister enthusiastic

Brussels (UP)

Reacting to Schuman's proposal to merge the German and French heavy industries, the Belgian Minister for Trade and Industry, Jean Duvieusart, declared yesterday, 'I am enthusiastic about the idea.'

London wants to examine proposals

*From our correspondent Curt Geyer
London, 10 May*

The Schuman proposal has changed the whole atmosphere surrounding the London Conference. It is not so much the content of the proposal itself that has caused such consternation in British Government circles as the sensational way in which it was thrown into the discussion. The possibility of a joint French, German, Belgian and Luxembourg steel cartel has been mooted on several occasions recently, so the core of the proposal is not in itself a surprise. What is surprising is the way French politicians have tried to seize the initiative in matters concerning the Ruhr, after they had halted further developments with their opposition to the new Law 75.

A Foreign Office spokesman said that the British Government had always maintained that it sees an end to the feud between France and Germany as a prerequisite for peace. It would be examining the proposal in that light, 'looking at all its implications and its furthest-reaching consequences'. There is no attempt to disguise the disagreeable surprise that this proposal, which struck the atmosphere of the London Conference like lightning, has caused in London. The newspaper of the Labour Party, the *Daily Herald*, said that the French surprise tactics were rather hard to understand. Official circles confirm that the French Embassy did not inform the British Government of the move until yesterday afternoon.

Robert Schuman is expected to provide a full explanation at the Conference of Foreign Ministers, which begins tomorrow. The assurances given in official circles that the proposal must first be examined meticulously, that consultations will have to be held not only with experts but also with the interested parties, above all the British Iron and Steel Federation, mean that a final decision is not expected to be reached at the Conference. In any case, the proposal will once again push strongly to the fore the notion of Europe organised as a third force.

It is open to doubt whether the British public will be receptive to the idea of UK participation in such an arrangement. Public opinion here has tended recently to go in the opposite direction. Amongst the British press, only the *News Chronicle* has welcomed the proposal without reservation.