

Robert Mischlich, A secret mission to Bonn: extract on how the plan was disclosed to Konrad Adenauer

Caption: A close colleague of the French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman, Robert Mischlich is entrusted with the secret mission of personally announcing the French initiative to pool European coal and steel to German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer on the morning of 9 May 1950.

Source: MISCHLICH, Robert. Une mission secrète à Bonn. Lausanne: Fondation Jean Monnet pour l'Europe, Centre de recherches européennes, 1986. 69 p. (Cahiers rouges). p. 58-63.

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As time was running out, Robert Schuman said to me: ‘You will travel to Bonn this evening and meet Chancellor Adenauer tomorrow before noon. You will hand to him personally two documents, one of which contains a summary of the proposal I shall present to the Council of Ministers on 9 May.’ My mission was thus perfectly clear and timed with unusual precision. The Minister added: ‘Only a few people know about this mission I’m assigning to you — Jean Monnet and Clappier are two of them, obviously — and it should remain secret until it has been completed. It is of the utmost importance that it should be that way, as the slightest indiscretion would be enough to ruin a plan by which I set great store.’ He then commented: ‘Chancellor Adenauer knows nothing of this, as nothing has been said or intimated to Bonn about what Rue Martignac has been preparing.’ ‘But if the Chancellor knows nothing about it,’ I replied, ‘he will surely ask me for information about the Saar and Ruhr.’ ‘I doubt it,’ Robert Schuman said, ‘as the very aim of the French plan is to solve those problems to which you refer. If he does mention them, simply tell him that these problems will be settled at a later date.’

Meeting a German Chancellor at a very precise time without any prior contact having been made with him, and without the knowledge of French officials or François-Poncet himself, seemed to me a most difficult task to accomplish. I was candid about my concerns. Robert Schuman replied rather mischievously: ‘This task is not beyond your capabilities. What is more, some situations in life reveal to us strengths we never knew we had.’ I took leave of my Minister, but not before he had wished me luck in my endeavour. That evening, I took the train to Bonn.

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