

'The French and the Schuman Plan' from Die Welt (18 April 1951)

Caption: On 18 April 1951, on the occasion of the signing of the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community, the German daily newspaper Die Welt outlines French fears concerning the power held by the High Authority and the economic might of Germany.

Source: Die Welt. Unabhängige Tageszeitung. Hrsg. Schulte, Heinrich ; Herausgeber Helbig, Adolf. 18.04.1951, Nr. 90; 6. Jg. Hamburg: Die Welt. "Die Franzosen und der Schuman-Plan", auteur:Grotkopp, Wilhelm , p. 2.

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The French and the Schuman Plan

Concerns about a ‘tyrannical supranational cartel’ and German competition, but the fundamental attitude is positive

From Dr Wilhelm Grotkopp, a member of our editorial staff reporting from Paris

Of the many, in some cases tricky questions that were put to the German Chancellor by the representatives of the diplomatic press corps when they were received here, only one related to the subject of this gathering, the Schuman Plan. Other problems of German politics, such as remilitarisation or neutralisation, were apparently of far more interest in Paris.

The politically well-informed French are taking hardly any notice of this Conference, which has now been in session since Wednesday of last week. Talks about the Coal and Steel Community are always no more than an exchange of platitudes and, as such, hardly reflect the belief or the conviction that the foundation stone for a new Europe is being laid during these very days and that the first significant breaching of the European customs barriers is now taking place. The atmosphere that facilitated the policies for Europe put forward by Aristide Briand or by his German counterpart Gustav Stresemann in the years around 1928 is missing. This is understandable, given the disappointments that followed the great expectations of that time and the bitter experiences of the previous decade.

Dispassionate critics

However, the fact that there is neither the enthusiasm nor the élan emanating from this Conference that is urgently needed, if broader sections of the population are to be addressed, is still a negative factor.

The doubts that are being voiced in the talks in Paris are hardly of a political nature. Admittedly, the general view is that, after the unfortunate experiences with the Benelux project and after the failure of other plans for customs unions, the Schuman Plan is the only way to overcome the customs barriers and to usher in the integration of the European economy. The Coal and Steel Community with its High Authority would be the germ cell of a new Europe. It is for this reason that, in spite of all the reservations, the policy should have been purposefully continued and expanded. However, there are doubts about the structure and the organs of this Coal and Steel Community. The French regard the High Authority as something sinister, as a tyrannical supranational cartel of gigantic proportions.

There are also fears that the High Authority would be increasingly obliged to intervene in the economic policies of the Member States by ‘policing’ their activities in an effort to approximate the conditions of competition and that it would not be long before the fiscal policies and the transport tariffs were also brought within their influence.

Advantages for Germany

In the face of such possibilities, even the French are recoiling from taking a positive stance towards the ideas of a planned economy. For the powers of the High Authority could go far beyond what a French amateur would wish to grant to his national government with regard to planning or controlling the economy. Freedom, which is fortunately still writ large in France, and the initiative of the individual mean so much to the French that they do not wish to see them smothered by authority.

In addition to this, there is a fear of the strength of German competition, a fear that German industry would continuously gain in influence within the Coal and Steel Community, because it is more expansive, more active and has more vitality. Reservations on the German side that the Ruhr industry could not have done any more towards the modernisation of its factories for two decades and that all the advantages of the armaments boom for coal and steel had benefited other regions are dismissed with a wave of the hand: ‘You Germans will manage this reconstruction in no time at all.’

The concerns about German competition are underlined by references to the fact that the character of the Monnet Plan is being determined by the desires and plans of the Americans. The influence exerted by the Americans comes about, so it is argued, because of the need to expand the industrial potential of the Atlantic world. The opportunities for export to the USA that arise from this would be of benefit, above all, to the German coal and steel industry; in France, there was a shortage of labour and also a lack of willingness to take on the not inconsiderable risk.

The most critical attitude is that of the iron industry. It is not the pillar of the Schuman–Monnet Plan at all. On the contrary, it feels that it has been overlooked and repeatedly stresses that it had not been informed about many important decisions until they were reported in the newspapers. It claims to be participating only because the Schuman Plan was right for the local situation, in which the Ruhr and Lorraine regions are forced to work together, and because it believes that it can head off dangerous tendencies in internal politics by using the Schuman Plan.

Objections of this and of a similar kind exist within the context of an overall positive attitude. Apart from the exceptional position of the Communists, purely negative opposition has been voiced only in expressly anti-German circles. A typical instance of this is an article in *L'Information* under the title 'The Trojan Horse'. This report, with a by-line of three asterisks, supports the thesis that the Schuman Plan is paving the way for the German coal and steel industry to dominate on the continent of Europe. The states that are now putting their signatures to it would be subjecting themselves to the High Authority for 50 years, and the High Authority would come increasingly under the influence of the state that exercises the dominating influence for coal and steel, namely Germany.

The only way

This opposition will not call the French ratification of the Schuman Plan by France into question. The parties which are admittedly not enthusiastic proponents but which see in the Schuman Plan the only way to a unified Europe will still be strong enough in the new National Assembly. Robert Schuman will have an easier time in the Parliament than Konrad Adenauer. However, the enthusiastic supporters are missing. The task of canvassing this support, and thus ensuring that, as the Schuman Plan comes into effect, it is welcomed joyfully by broad sections of the population as the beginning of a new era, remains a very important task, and not only for France.