

Note from the attaché of the Dutch Embassy in Luxembourg (3 February 1951)

Caption: On 3 February 1951, the Dutch Embassy in Luxembourg drafts a note on the reactions of the general public in Luxembourg to the issues surrounding the Schuman Plan.

Source: Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam. NVV - J.G. van Wouwe 1945-1973. Stukken betreffende Europese en internationale organisaties. Stukken betr. het Schuman Plan. 1950-1954. Diverse commissie. 1950-1952, 106.

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URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/note_from_the_attache_of_the_dutch_embassy_in_luxembourg_3_february_1951-en-a764c896-5a1e-49e7-8d99-051aae10bb15.html

Last updated: 05/07/2016



Public opinion on the Schuman Plan — Luxembourg (3 February 1951)

(Overview from the Netherlands Envoy to Luxembourg)

So far popular opinion in this country has not really voiced itself publicly on the Schuman Plan, which is strange in a land where steel plays a major part in the economy.

The reason for this is presumably that high steel prices exert a favourable influence on the entire Luxembourg economy, and it is thus easy for people to close their eyes to looming dangers.

In industrial circles, on the other hand, especially in the steel industry itself, the consequences of the Schuman Plan for Luxembourg industry are indeed being closely studied.

Two points have emerged in particular in those circles. In the first place, there is the question of bridging wage differences, of particular interest in the light of the fact that production costs in this country are very high because of the high level of wages (and welfare provisions), along with the elimination of unprofitable mines elsewhere, bearing in mind that Luxembourg mines are indeed profitable and are equipped to a modern standard. Secondly, there is the question of the powers of the 'High Authority', the greatest concern in that respect being whether sufficient scope would in fact be allowed in that body for the voice of the industry itself to be heard and listened to.

Now that the implementation of the Schuman Plan is approaching, objections to it are becoming louder and expression is being given more openly to the fear that the Luxembourg steel industry will be in a less favourable position as a result of it.

In this connection, it is considered probable that, in setting quotas, the High Authority will reduce Luxembourg exports to certain areas, and Luxembourg does not have the same transport facilities, which play an especially significant role in the supply of coal and coke, as other industrial centres. Hence the disadvantage of high production costs becomes even more acute, with the possibility that a lowering of wage levels will soon become a necessity in this country.

Attention is now also being drawn to the possible reduction of transit rates for the transport of Ruhr coal, as a result of which the revenue of the Luxembourg Railways would be seriously threatened, and hence transport costs for Luxembourg iron and steel products would be further adversely affected.

People want the Government to bring these points to the attention of the participants in the Schuman Plan before it makes a binding commitment.

There is, moreover, a certain fear in industrial circles, and in Socialist labour circles a certain hope, that in the long term the Schuman Plan will lead to nationalisation of the mines. The present Government here is not likely to cooperate in such a project, but in industrial circles the possibility is certainly being taken into account.

Of course it might be pointed out that so many Belgian, French and German interests exert an influence on the steel industry here that the pronouncements of leading figures from Luxembourg industry have to be seen in that light.

I would like to end with a brief extract from an interview with one of the members of the board of Luxembourg's largest iron and steel group, Arbed, which amounted to the following: 'We expect that an agreement will be reached shortly, and we hope that it will give us sufficient freedom of manoeuvre. We do not yet see how the question of the unprofitable Belgian mines will be resolved in conjunction with the wide pay differences, or how it will be possible to bring German and French wages into line in the foreseeable future. We think that a more or less formal arrangement will be pulled out of the hat.'

3 February 1951

