

'Schuman Plan must not suffer the same fate as Finebel' from Het Parool (20 June 1950)


Caption: On 20 June 1950, as negotiations open in Paris on the Schuman Plan, the Dutch daily newspaper Het Parool considers the United Kingdom's absence from the negotiating table and looks at the position adopted by the Netherlands in the light of the issues surrounding the Schuman Plan.

Source: Het Parool. Vrij Onverveerd. dir. de publ. Van Norden, W. ; Réd. Chef Van Heuven Goedhart, G.J. 20.06.1950, n° 1.670; 10. Jg. Amsterdam: Het Parool. "Men wil plan-SCHUMAN voor lot van FINEBEL behoeden", p. 1.

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Major conference in Paris

Schuman Plan must not suffer the same fate as Finebel

Dutch proposal also to be considered

(From our correspondent)

Paris, 20 June. — Today the conference on the Schuman Plan — the proposal to pool the coal and steel industry of Western Europe — started in the gilded Salle de l'Horloge in the French Foreign Ministry. Robert Schuman chaired the opening meeting in person. Six countries took part: France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and Italy. The French delegation was led by Mr Monnet, who managed to set his stamp on the French economic recovery plan and is regarded as one of the main authors of the Schuman Plan.

A serious task

The Paris conference was opened today by the French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman. His speech included the following points:

‘France has been criticised for acting prematurely. There has been talk of undue haste and audacity, but experience has taught us that the best initiatives are wasted when they are slowed down by preliminary consultation after they have been conceived.’

Mr Schuman continued: ‘However, no one has ever ventured on a system like the one we are about to discuss. Never before have nations decided jointly to hand over part of their sovereignty to an independent supranational body, or even considered such a possibility.’

‘Our initiative is in no way intended to deny or judge unfavourably the attempts made elsewhere in Europe to put the European economy on a sound footing. Mr Stikker has recently made an important and valuable contribution in a different field from ours. There is no question of the two aims imitating or conflicting with each other.’

The Minister concluded: ‘It is a serious task that our governments have entrusted to us. We are proud to accept it and are conscious of our responsibility. We understand that we cannot fail or give up without achieving a result.’

One country is not represented: the United Kingdom. It must be said that this first attempt to put European cooperation into practice has confirmed the non-involvement of the British sphere of influence. However, it will not be totally excluded. René Alphonse, head of the economic department in the French Foreign Ministry, will keep the British Ambassador informed of the progress of the negotiations. Mr Alphonse has the same role in the French Ministry as Mr Hirschfeld had before he was appointed High Commissioner, which was, as we know, a leading role.

Furthermore, the British committee of experts appointed by their government to study the Schuman Plan has almost completed its work. Its report will be presented to the British Government on Thursday and then passed on to Mr Poll, head of the British delegation to the OEEC, who will inform the conference delegations of parts of the report, depending on how the talks progress. It is not intended that the British observers should take an active part in the debate on legal forms, but when practical aspects come up for discussion the British will express their views.

Organisational plan

The French will no doubt propose an organisational plan to be laid down in a treaty. This will need to define the management powers, the role of the industrial body, and the guarantees the States will require if the new

body is to operate not only efficiently but also fairly. That is the constitutional or, if you will, the political starting point.

It is quite important. One only has to remember the fierce controversy that arose about the powers of the High Authority, since its power will certainly have to be based, at least in part, on small areas of sovereignty that the participating States are prepared to relinquish for their own benefit. However, some of the delegations at least are undoubtedly concerned with the economic, commercial or, if you like, practical aspect of the problems raised, and it is not inconceivable that the first disagreements will in fact arise on the question of which aspect should be given priority.

At all events, some of the Dutch realise that the French have launched a plan more notable for its theoretical attractiveness than its practical content. A similar view was taken of the announcement of Finebel, which eventually faded away and has disappeared from the scene. It is important to make sure that the Schuman Plan does not suffer a similar fate. In practical terms, the Schuman Plan is based on the premise of coordination of the various coal and steel interests, i.e. assimilation between wages and prices in that sector and, in the regulation of sales and production, a complex and, for some, probably even painful process that could have a severe impact on major interests. That is perhaps why Mr Schuman stated in a speech on Sunday that his plan required organisation only of production and not of sales, a statement that caused a certain amount of surprise. On that point the Benelux countries will want definite concrete proposals and, indeed, assurances.

It is also on this point that the Dutch plan can be considered, since it proposes a form of European integration that centres on compensation for interests that have to be sacrificed. The Belgians, whose coal and steel production is still in a fairly favourable position and who are mainly expecting from the Schuman Plan an easing of competition and an extension of their sales market, are a little less pessimistic in that respect. The Dutch delegation perhaps spent a day in Brussels *en route* for Paris in order to coordinate the positions of the Benelux countries in the meantime.

A few figures

To give an idea of the significance of the conference, these are a few figures for coal and steel production by the participating countries, in millions of tonnes:

	Steel	Coal	
France	9.1	103	
Saar region		1.8	14
West Germany		9.2	51
Belgium		3.8	28
Luxembourg		2.8	-
Netherlands		-	12
Italy	2.0	1	
Total	28.7	209	

However, the significance of the British position becomes clear when it is considered that, with the inclusion of the United Kingdom, the figures become 46.3 and 434. If the United Kingdom is involved, ninety per cent of the production is controlled by the organisation.

In the Finebel negotiations, the Netherlands took the view that economic cooperation without British participation was hardly acceptable. That point of view was dictated by our interests in the sterling area. Now we are faced with a *fait accompli*; on the other hand, the participation of Germany makes this economic cooperation more attractive, because in Germany, too, we have very real interests.

The fact that the conference took place is undoubtedly a triumph for France — a political triumph. However, all hopes are focused on economic success (in other words, a properly functioning economic organisation), and only if that result is achieved does the conference really acquire the hoped-for significance.

