‘The outlook for Europe' from Het Vrije Volk (10 May 1950)

Caption: On 10 May 1950, the day after the press conference held by Robert Schuman on the pooling of coal and steel in Europe, the Dutch daily newspaper Het Vrije Volk welcomes the French Government’s initiative.

Source: Het Vrije Volk. 10.05.1950. [s.l.]. "Perspectief voor Europa".

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The outlook for Europe

As Trygve Lie, the Norwegian Secretary-General of the United Nations, heads for Moscow for talks with Stalin, preparatory talks have begun in Paris and London by the three foreign ministers of the USA, Britain and France. The importance of these talks cannot be emphasised too strongly, for Russia has time and can wait, whereas in 1952, when American Marshall aid ends, the battered and bruised nations of Europe will have to stand on their own feet. The opening of the London talks is a promising sign.

Firstly there is the provisional agreement between the French and the Americans on the joint defence of Indochina. The French, understandably enough, have long been upset that the burden of the war in Indochina against communism, which aims to triumph over nationalism everywhere in the Far East, is being borne by France alone. If the French are defeated in Indochina, the communists will be at the gates in Burma, Thailand and Malaya too. The French thus argue, not unreasonably, that France alone should not have to bear the whole burden of the war in Indochina. A quarter of the French defence budget is already being spent on the Indochina conflict.

And that is not all. Part of the French army is no longer available to defend France's own borders, and yet in the event of any conflict in Europe the main force, in terms of troop numbers, will have to come firstly from France and secondly from Britain. That sense of unease in France is partly responsible for a fairly widespread view that, in the event of outright war between America and Russia, France should adopt a policy of armed neutrality. In recent weeks the daily *Le Monde* has been the chief proponent of these neutralist views.

The second optimistic note comes from West Germany itself. Federal Chancellor Adenauer will recommend to the parliament in Bonn that Germany joins the Council of Europe. It seems certain that this proposal will be approved. Admittedly, Kurt Schumacher, the Social Democrat leader, has said that his party will vote against, but it is quite possible that Schumacher may change his mind at the eleventh hour. For him the major stumbling block was the Saar, but it has been made less insurmountable by France's latest proposal for the pooling of coal and steel production in France, Germany and the Saarland too.

This French proposal, in the rough outline announced so far, is certainly the most important one since the liberation of 1945. For the German Socialists in particular it must be a very attractive idea. They have always stubbornly opposed any unilateral internationalisation of the Ruhr, even at international socialist conferences where the other socialist parties in Europe were pressing for this as a first step towards international control of the key European industries. The German Socialists wanted all or nothing: international administration of the heavy industry not only of Germany, but also of France, Lorraine, Luxembourg, Belgium and the Netherlands. The 1948 International Socialist Conference in Vienna called for this too, but no one expected swift action in response to the Vienna resolution. There was not even much propaganda in favour of it, unfortunately. The only person to argue for it was the late Léon Blum in the Paris socialist daily *Le Populaire*.

This new French proposal officially comes from the Government. In political and economic terms and psychologically too it is of the utmost significance: one of the most important steps along the road towards the peaceful unification of Europe and an extremely valuable complement to the Atlantic Treaty — which deals far too much in divisions that exist only on paper.