

Press release from the President of the ECSC Consultative Committee (Luxembourg, 6 March 2002)

Caption: On 6 March 2002, in view of the crisis affecting the American steel industry and President George Bush's decision to cut steel imports into the USA, Enrico Gibellieri, President of the ECSC Consultative Committee, maintains that the instruments of the ECSC Treaty (a few months prior to its expiry) stand as a model for crisis-management in the large industrial sectors in any part of the world.

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President Bush's decision to introduce duties on imports of steel products into the USA represents a serious and unjustified distortion of the principles of free trade which go to the very heart of the WTO.

The causes of the crisis in part of the US steel industry have been clear for some time. They lie in integrated steel producers' failure to restructure and modernise, difficulties in meeting the quantitative and qualitative levels of domestic demand and the costs which the US social model imposes on businesses.

As President of the ECSC Consultative Committee (the consultative body which maintains dialogue between representatives of workers, producers, consumers and dealers in the coal and steel sectors and the Commission, and which has overseen the continued restructuring and modernisation of the European steel industry for 50 years), I take the view that the Bush administration's decision may undermine the results which the EU has achieved while fully observing the rules of international trade over years of hard work and sacrifices borne by all the social partners involved.

European steel products achieved their current level of competitiveness on world markets in return for heavy social and financial costs and a commitment to research and development which the instruments of the ECSC Treaty enabled us to assume. The European Commission raised these with the Bush administration in good time and identified them as a solution to the problems which the US steel industry is facing at present.

I agree with and fully support the position the European Commission took yesterday.

I wish also to announce that, as of tomorrow, 7 March, the ECSC Consultative Committee will begin to discuss these important subjects in a working party set up to adopt an official decision at the next meeting of the Consultative Committee on 10 April 2002.

I warn that the ECSC Consultative Committee will not simply protest, but will also identify possible responses to the crisis in the US steel industry, based on the seasoned experience of the harsh restructuring the industries in every European Union Member State have undergone in the last 50 years.

In the light of the differences between the position of the European steel industry and its counterpart in the USA, in the very year in which it is to expire, the ECSC Treaty again proves its full effectiveness and continuing validity, and stands as a model for crisis action in large sectors of industry in any part of the world in future.

[signature]

Enrico Gibellieri

President of the ECSC Consultative Committee