

‘The signing of the Schuman Plan’ from Le Monde (20 April 1951)

Caption: On 20 April 1951, the French daily newspaper Le Monde comments on the signing, two days earlier in Paris, of the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and emphasises the difficulties which need to be overcome in order to ensure the proper implementation of the Schuman Plan.

Source: Le Monde. 20.04.1951, n° 1940; 8e année. Paris: Le Monde. "La signature du plan Schuman", p. 1.

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The signing of the Schuman Plan

The plan for a European coal and steel community, which was announced on 9 May 1950 by Robert Schuman and is to bear his name, was signed in Paris yesterday. It will have to be ratified by the national parliaments within the next six months, which will be no easy task: the difficulties facing Chancellor Adenauer in Germany have already been mentioned. Yet what will happen in France if the voting takes place in a new Assembly, whose composition and complexion are unforeseeable?

Following a year of sometimes tricky negotiations, it cannot be said that everything went as initially hoped. The situation in the coal and steel market has changed, thus altering the inclinations of the producers. In most countries they have manifested a certain diffidence, which has not discouraged the workforce from adopting the same attitude. Mistrust and narrow interests have come to the fore, quite predictably. It is to be hoped that understanding and harmony will develop among those who are interested in working together.

The High Authority is there precisely to help achieve this end. It is a French concept that Mr Monnet has promoted with great energy and skill. If it has finally triumphed, it has not done so without losing part of its original character in the course of the discussions. The countries supporting it would only accept it with the inclusion of a Council of Ministers, a Parliamentary Assembly and a Court of Justice, all of which would encroach upon the powers of this Authority. Resistance to supranational sovereignty was even manifest in the discussions concerning the number of its members. France and Germany wanted to limit this to five, which would not have allowed all six countries to be represented: it was believed that this would make it clear that these members were not the delegates of their country of origin. However, nine members had to be allowed.

One difficulty arose concerning the Saar. The Saar Government would have liked to be directly elected and even to take part in the signing. However, the German Government opposed this, arguing that it had never recognised Mr Hoffmann's government. In the end it was accepted that, on the grounds that the Saar was associated economically with France, steel and coal from the Saar would be included in the European Community as French. In the Parliamentary Assembly, France will hand over three of its eighteen seats to representatives from the Saar. In an exchange of letters, the French and German Governments have declared that each party will stand by its point of view, whilst recognising that of the other. The status of the Saar will be settled once and for all by the Peace Treaty.

This solution seems to be satisfactory for the moment, although there is nothing to prove that this will always be the case. The disturbances that have recently taken place in the internal politics of the Saar, and the elections planned for 1952, may well give the lie to the optimism shown by Mr Adenauer.

As long as nothing untoward happens in the parliaments, the implementation of the Schuman Plan will be the start of a grand project. It may have its faults. Certain interests are demonstrating for and against it, and it would be interesting to know, for example, following the dismantling of the German industrial steel cartels, who the true owners will be. But the fact that six countries have decided to work together is even more important than the pooling of their basic industries. As the authors of the plan have repeated, it must be the first step towards a European Community which will no longer merely be one of coal and steel.