

Address given by Robert Schuman on the origin and elaboration of the Schuman Plan (Bruges, 22–23 October 1953)

Caption: On 22 and 23 October 1953, inaugurating the Chair in his name for European economic issues, the former French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman, gives a lecture to students at the College of Europe in Bruges in which he emphasises the objectives and philosophy of the Schuman Plan and particularly highlights the role played by Jean Monnet in the development and implementation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC).

Source: Cahiers de Bruges. Décembre 1953. [s.l.]: Collège d'Europe.

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Publication date: 20/10/2012

Origin and elaboration of the "Schuman Plan"

English Summary

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The Plan was an integral part of the sequence of events that had brought into being the Atlantic Pact, the Council of Europe and the Federal German Constitution. At the beginning of 1950, relations with the Soviet Union showed no improvement, and it was becoming more and more apparent that the gradual re-admission of Western Germany into the community of nations was not being carried out in the most satisfactory spirit. Reparations, the limitation of steel production, the supervision of legislation in the Länder, the problems of the Saar and of the Ruhr—all these factors combined to retard the moral rehabilitation which should have accompanied the progressive restitution of political rights. A change of mentality was required, above all on the part of France, and it was for her to take the initiative. The traditional antagonism between the two countries must be replaced by a community of interests.

Apart from the Franco-German question, there were very good economic reasons for the proposals contained in the Plan. The economic absurdities inherent in the nationalist structure of Europe, particularly in a Europe politically cut in two, and placed between such powerful neighbours as North America, the Soviet bloc and the British Commonwealth, were becoming increasingly apparent.

The task was a twofold one; on the one hand, the progressive breaking down of barriers, on the other, the rational co-ordination of production and the freeing of capital and labour. The idea of a complete economic union was rejected, and it was decided to concentrate on certain specified products. The coal and steel industries, so long the cause of bitter rivalries, seemed to offer ideal material for this experiment. These key industries are carried on, independently of climatic or local conditions, in all six of the countries concerned. Their products are in universal demand; the broadening of the market would guarantee a measure of economic expansion and a raising of the general standard of living. It would also eliminate rivalries in the export market.

But the declaration of May 9th 1950 also had great political significance, primarily in that it would make it impossible for any one of the associated countries even to prepare war against the others. It also disposed of the problem of the Ruhr, which had been a major headache to the Allies since 1945, and was an important step towards the decartelisation of German industry which had been agreed on at Potsdam. Finally, it enormously simplified the question of the Saar.

The announcement of the project had the effect of a bombshell. Gt. Britain, despite a measure of initial enthusiasm in some government circles, soon made it clear that she felt unable to accept the principle of a supranational authority. It was inconceivable to the British mind that there should be in Europe a body possessing a greater measure of authority than the Parliament at Westminster. No supranational authority existed within the Commonwealth, and no supranational authority was therefore tolerable in a European framework. Furthermore, the British preference for an unwritten constitution makes the idea of a precise written commitment unattractive. In the months that preceded the conference, France was accused of intransigence in not allowing the attendance of British observers, but it was felt that the presence of elements not committed to the basic idea that had brought us together could do no good.

The conference, when it met, was something altogether new. The delegates met not with intent to negotiate to their own advantage, but in a creative spirit of co-operation.

Relations between the various delegations and private interests would obviously be a matter of some delicacy. There were complaints from certain quarters that there had not been sufficient consultation; some industrialists felt that they had been presented with a fait accompli. Since the signing of the Treaty, however, all the parties concerned have shown complete loyalty.

The French Parliament was also dissatisfied. It felt that it should have been kept informed of day to day progress. Technically, this was not possible. Parliamentary indecision being what it is, it was even undesirable. Constitutionally, the Government was fully within its rights.

The Treaty was signed in Paris on April 18th 1951. Ratification took a little longer. The members of the various bodies were easily chosen; the choice of Luxemburg as the headquarters only came after a strenuous all night session. The Community started to function on August 10th 1952, and on the same day the British government accredited a permanent representative to the High Authority. Since then, a permanent U.S. representative has been appointed, as well as observers from Switzerland, Sweden and Norway.

This can obviously not remain an isolated phenomenon. It must inevitably bring in its train an ever-increasing measure of unification. This has always been our intention. Today, fourteen months after the Community came into existence, we have no reason to feel that we were mistaken.