

Telegram from David Bruce to Dean Acheson (Paris, 4 June 1950)

Caption: On 4 June 1950, David Bruce, US Ambassador to Paris, sends a telegram to Dean Acheson, US Secretary of State, in which he expresses his regret at the United Kingdom's decision not to take part in the implementation of the Schuman Plan and emphasises the importance of congratulating France for its leadership in this matter. According to the US Ambassador to Paris, it is essential that the United States reaffirm its support for the plan to pool European coal and steel production.

Source: Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950. Volume III: Western Europe. Washington: Department of State, 1977.

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The Ambassador in France (Bruce) to the Secretary of State

SECRET
PARIS, June, 4, 1950—2 p. m.

2669. Now that French and five other continental nations have decided after fruitless negotiations with British to go ahead and implement the Schuman plan I hope that our government will sympathetically and vigorously encourage this initiative. It is regrettable that UK did not see its way clear to endorse scheme at this time by accepting chief principle involved namely creation of supranational authority to direct coal and steel pooling arrangement.

This surrender of a portion of national sovereignty having proved unacceptable to British Government there is naturally great concern amongst participating countries to be reassured that we are still favorable to proposed integration. Indeed it would be highly inconsistent if we did not reaffirm our position in the matter.

On many occasions we have exhorted West European nations to unity of action in economic and military and even in political field. Since because of British refusal to join in such an endeavor we cannot presently hope to see a complete structure erected we should not be chary of admiration for architectural plans which are more modest in scale.

One of great objectives of our foreign policy has been to bring non-communized Germany into closest possible communion with its western neighbors. The obstacles to such an achievement for a long period seemed almost insuperable. Various combinations and even expedients were discussed and found impracticable of realization. Then the French proposal, audacious in nature, comprehensive in concept opened up new possibility of European integration and at least offered prospect of moderating century old antagonism between French and Germans. It moreover had profound psychological implications. France, the natural leader of continental civilization had emerged from her lethargy and spirit of defeatism and had once again erected a standard to which her neighbors could rally.

One cannot predict how the policy of the British Government may now unfold in this particular. Various reasons have been adduced for its decision. It is said that its Commonwealth obligations make it impossible to adhere as a full partner just as it had been unwilling for the same reason to join unreservedly in the operations of the OEEC.¹ It has also been stated that its planned economy could not readily be adjusted to such a novel change in its social industrial and commercial relationships. Moreover it would of course be indisposed to turn over an iota of its sovereignty to guardianship of a committee of individuals whose authority is undefined and whose intentions are unknown, even though others were willing make this venturesome leap into the dark.

There are other explanations of the UK attitude all of which probably had some bearing on its action. Perhaps the most important point if one speculates upon motivation is the traditional foreign policy of the UK still tenaciously if somewhat covertly cherished despite debilitating wars and diminution of Empire, that assesses European politics in terms of balance of power.

There is however nothing constructive to be gained by being over-critical of Great Britain in this connection although I think it might be observed with justice that the manner in which it has lately attempted to sabotage the Schuman proposal displayed a vacuum of comprehension and an ineptness of diplomatic intercourse which is quite unusual. Whitehall has not often, after its secret proposals of compromise had been politely but firmly disapproved, resorted to the public press to repeat a suggestion that had been officially rejected by a friendly government a few hours before. (Mytel 2668.²)

Under any circumstances it will be no easy thing for these participating nations to agree upon treaty terms which will secure approval of their respective parliaments. Except in certain definite economic instances such as the abolition of customs barriers throughout the area, the elimination of discriminatory freight rates, the prohibition of double prices etc., each question taken under consideration will involve long-range planning of extraordinary complexity.

The French hope is to reach an agreement in treaty form embodying broad principles and to leave the technical details to be worked out later.

This is a formidable task and in its initial stages the US can contribute little except moral support. But this moral support is of cardinal importance.

I, therefore, respectfully recommend that Department consider immediately the advisability of the President issuing a statement congratulating the French for their leadership in this enterprise, felicitating the other countries associated with it on their participation and wishing them well in this adventurous but peaceful combination.

I discussed this question yesterday with Ambassador Douglas whose views are generally in accord with the above recommendation but who will communicate them himself to the Department.

Sent Department 2669; repeated info London 744, Rome 206, Luxembourg 23, Brussels 134, The Hague 80, Frankfurt 386. Pass to Hoffman³ and Harriman.

BRUCE

1 For documentation on this subject, see pp. 611 ff.

2 June 3, not printed.

3 ECA Administrator Paul G. Hoffman.