

'The Schuman Plan and Belgium' from La Libre Belgique (23 May 1950)

Caption: On 23 May 1950, the daily newspaper La Libre Belgique publishes the declaration made by Belgian Foreign Minister Paul van Zeeland, who adopts a cautious view on the Schuman Plan.

Source: The National Archives of the United Kingdom, [s.l.], Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4DU.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>, Records created and inherited by the Foreign Office, FO. Schuman plan for the whole of the French and German coal and steel production to be placed under a common High Authority: discussions and negotiations 1950, FO 371/85843.

La Libre Belgique. 23.05.1950. Bruxelles: Société d'Édition des Journaux du Patriote.

Copyright: (c) The National Archives of the United Kingdom

URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/the_schuman_plan_and_belgium_from_la_libre_belgique_23_may_1950-en-6b974c22-d0da-4818-a03d-4bdd97b9e806.html

Publication date: 20/09/2012

The Schuman Plan and Belgium

"It seems to me that M. Schuman's plan should be welcomed. It is based on principles which one can only approve and whose application is calculated to give a better balance to Western Europe.

The possibilities of production in Belgium, as in France and Germany, are such that any proposal for co-ordination deserves a priori to receive detailed study.

Naturally it is in the practical application of this plan that difficulties may arise. The choice of method is of primary importance. It will be necessary to take account of the conditions of production peculiar to each country, conditions which themselves are dependent on wages and social charges. Preliminary attempts should therefore be made to reduce differences between countries in this sector.

On the other hand, the development of production must take account of the possibilities of consumption. This implies co-ordination of industrial expansion.

Finally, if such an agreement is to be fruitful, it will be necessary to achieve a progressive "normalisation" of prices.

It is evident that agreements of this importance cannot work satisfactorily, unless the peculiar conditions of each participating country are first honestly faced. It therefore appears to be necessary to consider the establishment of a pool, from the operation of which each of the participants would obtain advantages of the same order. On the other hand, it seems desirable that any particular firm should be able to enjoy a legitimate profit as a result of applying more intelligent and more rational methods of production.

Moreover, it is clearly essential that private initiative should be fully respected, since on no account must this admirable programme be allowed to lead to a return to excessive "dirigisme", or to the creation of a situation which would be nothing else than a disguised nationalisation of industry.

It will be incumbent upon the respective Governments to apply this agreement in the most liberal spirit, agreements on production, sales and distribution having as their corollary undertakings in respect of customs duties and licensing and other measures of the same kind. In other words no country should seek to obtain an unwarranted advantage in relation to its associates.

These principles granted, I think that Belgium, where the steel and coal industries are important, will play a positive part in the study of the plan suggested by the French Minister for Foreign Affairs and in its execution, if it is realised. For if this plan is put into operation in the spirit which I have indicated above, it should produce results which would be in the interests of consumers and producers alike.

However, the agreement would become ineffective if the movement of capital were not at the same time made more "normal". I am optimistic on this point and I hope very much that in the forthcoming meetings of the O.E.E.C. in Paris a long step forward will be taken towards this goal, with the collaboration of all countries, including Britain."