

From the Schuman Plan to the signing of the ECSC Treaty

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On [9 May 1950](#), in a speech inspired by [Jean Monnet](#), French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman proposed the [pooling of the coal and steel resources](#) of France and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) within an organisation that would be open for membership to other European countries.

Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet sought to use this almost revolutionary declaration to generate a shock wave that would launch the process of European unification. Drafted in conditions of utmost secrecy, the Schuman Declaration aimed to bring about a profound change in mentalities that would help win over the people of Europe. But Schuman needed first of all to secure the agreement of his own Government, whilst ensuring that he also had the support of [Konrad Adenauer](#) and the United States.

Business circles, and coal and steel producers in particular, were deliberately not involved in the planning stage. Had the Plan been disclosed, it would probably have given rise to numerous objections from French business leaders and awakened the mistrust of their German counterparts.

Similarly, Robert Schuman decided to leave [French MPs](#) in the dark, fearing that they would be more interested in the institutional implications than in the project itself.

Very few people outside France were aware of the Plan. Bypassing diplomatic channels, the US Secretary of State, [Dean Acheson](#), was informed personally of the Plan, and he immediately assured Schuman of his interest and support. On 8 May, Schuman himself presented his plan to the five Ministers for Economic Affairs from the United Kingdom, the three Benelux countries and Italy at a highly secret meeting in Paris. On the evening of 8 May, all the working documents were destroyed. Strengthened by an endorsement from France's allies, Schuman dispatched his personal envoy, [Robert Mischlich](#), to Bonn in order to inform Konrad Adenauer. Early that year, Adenauer had already had an opportunity to discuss with Schuman whether the time was ripe for a Europe-wide agreement. On the morning of 9 May, Mischlich handed to the German Chancellor and to his Private Secretary, [Herbert Blankenhorn](#), the official text of the French proposal for a joint High Authority as well as a [confidential letter](#) that referred to the extremely political nature of the Plan. [Adenauer](#) was delighted, and he immediately assured Mischlich of his support. As soon as Schuman was notified by telephone, he was able to inform the French Cabinet late on the morning of 9 May. Everything was then ready for a press conference at the Quai d'Orsay at 6 p.m. the same day.

The press conference was held at 6 p.m. on 9 May 1950 in the [Salon de l'Horloge at the Quai d'Orsay](#) (the French Foreign Ministry). More than 200 journalists from France and abroad were invited to witness the declaration by the French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman, concerning the pooling of coal and steel resources. But, having been informed of the press conference at the last minute, few were actually able to attend. Only [journalists](#) based in Paris witnessed the event. There were no photographers in attendance, nor radio or television to record proceedings. As a matter of interest, Schuman was obliged to record [his famous address](#) shortly afterwards for posterity.

The declaration underlined the role played by France in the construction of a strong, prosperous and peaceful Europe, resting on a Franco-German foundation. The declaration did not simply set out the objectives. It also proposed opening negotiations on clearly defined principles. It set out the purpose of the High Authority, which was referred to for the first time in the international arena. In a preliminary statement, René Mayer, the French Minister for Justice and Member of Parliament for Constantine, insisted that France should also invite the other European nations to work jointly to support [development in Africa](#), since France was no longer able to meet the costs of developing its overseas territories alone.

[Political circles in France](#), from the Christian Democrats to the Socialists, were broadly in support of the Foreign Minister's initiative. Notwithstanding some reservations, the Popular Republican Movement (MRP) and the French Section of the Workers' International (*Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière*) (SFIO) supported Robert Schuman's proposal. The Socialists, while fearing that Europe would bear the stamp of the Christian Democrats, recognised the economic advantages that the Schuman Plan appeared to offer. Right-wing nationalists, however, rejected any agreement with Germany, as did the Communist opposition. [The Communist Party](#) saw the establishment of a Western European entity as being hostile to the Soviet Union and of benefit only to the American economy. The steel lobby, who feared foreign competition and central planning, also engaged in a [virulent campaign](#) against the plan to establish a High Authority. As for public opinion in France, it showed broad support for the French Foreign Minister's initiative.

Robert Schuman's declaration took Germany by surprise since it represented a total reversal of French policy towards its neighbour. The proposal that Germany should be offered [equal treatment](#) could not fail to be welcomed since it satisfied a long-standing German demand and made possible [the irreversible integration of the Federal Republic of Germany into Western Europe](#).

The reaction of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, who was personally informed of the Plan by Schuman only on the morning of 9 May 1950, was shown in his [gratitude towards France](#). The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Liberal Party (FDP), like [most business leaders](#) and even German trade unions, were almost unreservedly in favour of the French Plan.

The Social Democratic Party (SPD), which strongly supported a united Germany, feared a deepening of the division between the part of Germany that was under Western influence and the other part, which was under Soviet influence. The SPD's pacifist and anti-capitalist orientation made it all the more mistrustful of the Schuman Plan since the Plan did not include the nationalisation of heavy industry in the Ruhr basin, a measure for which the Social Democrats had been calling for some time. German public opinion, although aware of [the Plan's symbolic value](#), was for the most part undecided and even, at times, hostile and ill-informed.

On 18 April 1951, the [Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community \(ECSC\)](#) was signed in Paris by Robert Schuman for France, Konrad Adenauer for the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), Paul van Zeeland and Joseph Meurice for Belgium, Count Carlo Sforza for Italy, Joseph Bech for Luxembourg and Dirk Stikker and Jan van den Brink for the Netherlands.

The Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) created several [institutions](#) responsible for the pooling of Europe's coal and steel resources and, in addition, for maintaining peace in Europe:

- a High Authority assisted by a Consultative Committee;
- a Common Assembly;
- a Court of Justice;
- a Special Council of Ministers.

The High Authority's supranational character was a major breakthrough. The Members of the High Authority did not actually represent their own country's interests but were under oath to defend the general interest of the Member States. They enjoyed wide-ranging powers to help them achieve this aim. For example, they were able to intervene in national coal and steel markets but without being able to replace the existing businesses as such. The High Authority's financial autonomy, which was guaranteed by a 'tax' based on a maximum 1 % levy on the turnover of coal and steel companies, reinforced its independence vis-à-vis the six governments.