

Note from the Dutch Embassy in Paris (1951)

Caption: In 1951, the press officer at the Dutch Embassy in Paris drafts a note on the reactions of the general public and the French press to the challenges of the Schuman Plan.

Source: Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam. NVV - J.G. van Wouwe 1945-1973. Stukken betreffende Europese en internationale organisaties. Stukken betr. het Schuman Plan. 1950-1954. Diverse commissie. 1950-1952, 106.

Copyright: (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.

Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/note_from_the_dutch_embassy_in_paris_1951-en-c295d7dd-3f3c-41e1-a4ad-271359862445.html

Last updated: 05/07/2016



Public opinion on the Schuman Plan — France (1951)

Review by the press attaché at the Netherlands Embassy in Paris

One month after the proposal for the Schuman Plan was announced the trade unions had expressed support for it, apart from the General Confederation of Labour (CGT).

Only a few of the political parties had stated their position, however.

The French employers' association, the CNPF, and the farmers' union, the CGA, also declared themselves to be in favour. The wheat growers' association wanted the Plan to be extended to include agriculture.

At their party congresses the Popular Republican Movement (MRP) and the French Section of the Workers' International (SFIO) declared their support for the Plan. The right-wing *Alliance démocratique* and the Communists opposed it. The comments of the Rally of the French People (RPF) were equivocal. Gaston Palewski called the Plan 'an easy trump card', whilst General de Gaulle described it as a 'messy approach to coal and steel, with no clear idea of where it is going'. Clearly, this position of the RPF was prompted by the suspicions entertained by the government of the Fourth Republic about a resurgent Germany.

The following political figures expressed approval, in some cases qualified approval: Paul Reynaud, Édouard Bonnefous, André Philip and the leaders of the Socialists and the MRP.

Those against included the right-wing members of the Assembly Louis Marin and Pierre-Étienne Flandin. In most cases the opinions voiced were influenced by foreign policy considerations (the European idea and American support, in the case of those in favour, and support for Russian policy or anti-German feeling in the case of those against). Resistance from the steel industry was driven by technical and economic factors.

The principle of the supranational authority is not an issue. National sovereignty and independence have not been adduced as arguments, except by the Communists. Some criticised the fact that the Plan was limited to iron and steel and wanted to see a European political authority.

Critical voices included the Communists, who spoke of a disguised cartel, whilst some in the major industries talked of international nationalisation. The Socialists' reservations arose from their insistence that the trade unions should be represented in the High Authority, seeing this as a *sine qua non* of British accession.

Le Monde of 20 May 1950 insisted that the coal and steel pool, or community, should be independent of any national body.

The Socialists wanted the High Authority to have powers as an international political authority.

Communist criticism warned of the danger that manufacturing plants in France would be closed down and that French miners and steelworkers would see their standard of living fall.

Some commentators thought the Schuman Plan spelled the end of the Monnet Plan, whilst others saw it as giving fresh impetus to the Monnet Plan.

Combat thought the Schuman Plan was prompted by the failure of the Monnet Plan.

Arguments adduced by advocates of the new Plan (excluding political arguments) are as follows: an equalisation of competition conditions, a faster rise in the rate of production and the standard of living, and more opportunities for the industry to grow.

Raymond Aron saw the Schuman Plan as a necessary prerequisite of liberalising trade amongst the countries of Europe.

Newspapers like *L'Aurore*, *Le Populaire*, *La Croix*, *L'Aube* and *Le Monde* (Maurice Duverger) saw the Plan as a chance to establish a European market and perhaps a European federative structure, brought about by the creation of an international civil service.

Immediately following the psychological bombshell of the Schuman Plan's announcement, many commentators already saw it as an excellent way of remedying Europe's loss of political influence and countering the European countries' economic apathy.

Those concerned with the international aspects of the Plan confined themselves almost exclusively to certain aspects of the Franco-German relationship, without considering what role France should play in the Cold War.

Whilst the principal fear of the Communists was that the Plan, if realised, would make the Ruhr into an arsenal ready for war against Russia, and that this would place France even more firmly in the power of the Americans and the German capitalists, those in favour of the proposed Plan did not concern themselves with the question of Western European rearmament, regarding the Plan as a means of blocking any future German efforts to rearm (Jules Moch).

Many of those in favour of the Plan saw it as a way of consolidating good relations between France and Germany, since it would make war between the two countries materially impossible and lock West Germany firmly into the European camp. But it is clear that this thinking was motivated more by the desire for a united Europe than for a Franco-German *entente*. It should be noted here that the French Socialists spoke out against a cosier Franco-German relationship, fearing that this would alienate the British.

French commentators, in their analysis, have never looked at the problem of Germany in the context of the post-war situation and the estrangement between the USA and the Soviet Union.

Some newspapers, notably the left-wing *Franc-Tireur* and the *Observateur*, wrote in May and June of 1950 that the Schuman Plan would enable Europe to have a degree of independence from the USA.

Lastly, it is worth noting that the implications of the Schuman Plan for African development have been virtually ignored.

We offer below a number of French press reports which have appeared since the middle of December 1950.

In the 15 December 1950 edition of *Le Populaire* Robert Lacoste writes of his impression that the industrialists of the Ruhr are keen to use the Schuman Plan as a way of safeguarding their privileges, and he wonders 'are we to be partners or underlings?' This question has dominated French press commentary since then, especially in view of the difficulties created by a hardening of the German position on dismantling cartels. On 29 December the Gaullist-leaning *L'Aurore* wrote that failure to secure an agreement would be regrettable. If the League of Nations had had the backing of a Schuman Plan, disasters might have been averted.

Along the same lines, on 20 December, the *Journal des Finances* wrote that the coal and steel pool would foster harmonious economic development, something that was needed now in the aftermath of Korea. A central grouping as envisaged in the Schuman Plan could only increase Europe's influence. Despite the repeatedly expressed doubts of the French steel industry, the Plan was a good thing, primarily when considering the prospect of international development.

By contrast, on 13 January the economic journal *L'Information* published an anonymous letter 'from a prominent industrialist' who opposed the Plan because of its attendant technocratic tendencies.

L'Aube, the party organ of the MRP, took a wholeheartedly optimistic view, also of the chances of reaching agreement on Articles 60 and 61 (outlawing of cartels). On this matter Joseph Denais, a member of the Assembly's Finance Committee, wrote on 17 January 1951 in *L'Information* that the Germans had tried everything they could and exploited all the opposition to the Plan in order to win concessions on the question of cartels.

Georges Villiers, chairman of the French employers' association (CNPF), said in January that whilst he was favourably inclined towards Schuman's initiative, he had doubts about the delicate issues that practical implementation of it would raise.

The conclusion reached by three articles published this month in the left-wing paper *Combat* is that the Schuman Plan has lost its political justification in the light of Germany's plans to rearm, which have pushed the Schuman Plan into the background. So just as it did after the First World War, Germany is playing its own game and has seized the initiative.

It is thus understandable, says *Combat*, that France is perhaps no longer quite so keen on swift conclusion of an agreement. As a result, France has once again let slip its hopes of a leadership role in Europe.

That pessimism was echoed on 27 January by Maurice Delarue, writing in *France-Soir*. Under the headline 'Schuman Plan stalled for 2 months now', he said 'The success of the talks now depends on Germany's response to the proposals for dismantling Germany's heavy industry; the German trusts are drawing encouragement from the war in Korea and from rearmament in their opposition to the organisation of the European market.'

Lastly, the most recent article on the Schuman Plan, published on 28 January in *Le Monde* under the byline of René Dabernat, remarks that 'The High Authority is taking on more and more of a political tinge, when initially it was intended to be a *troisième force*'. The effect of the Plan, which has the backing of the USA, and will soon perhaps have financial backing too, will be to lock Germany into the Atlantic camp. Dabernat sees this, especially with an eye to a possible Four-Power Conference, as an important development. Without American support, he says, France will have lost the battle for the Ruhr.