

Discretion is the order of the day

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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.