

'A step towards European unity' from the Luxemburger Wort (10 May 1950)

Caption: On 10 May 1950, the Luxembourg daily newspaper Luxemburger Wort considers the factors motivating Robert Schuman, French Foreign Minister, who published his plan for a European coal and steel pool the previous day.

Source: Luxemburger Wort. Für Freiheit und Recht. 10.05.1950, n° 130; 103e année. Luxembourg: Imprimerie Saint-Paul. "Ein Schritt auf dem Weg zur europäischen Einheit", p. 1.

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Last updated: 06/07/2016

A step towards European unity

Proposal for a Franco-German coal and steel production association with subsequent accession by other countries

Paris, 10 May. Yesterday, the French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman, presented a French Government proposal to place the whole of France and Germany's coal and steel production under joint administration within an organisation that would be open to all European states. The pooling of the coal and steel production of Lorraine, the Saarland and the Ruhr would change the destinies of regions which had long been devoted to the manufacture of munitions of war. The French decision, taken yesterday during a cabinet meeting, came just a short time after Mr Schuman's discussions with the US Foreign Secretary, Dean Acheson.

Mr Schuman said that other Western European countries, in particular Belgium, the Netherlands, *Luxembourg*, Italy and the United Kingdom, would be invited to join a 'common High Authority' and place their coal and steel industries under its control.

'World peace', Mr Schuman said, 'cannot be safeguarded without the making of efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it.' Pooling coal and steel production would 'immediately provide for the setting-up of common foundations for economic development.'

As recently as two months ago, France concluded an agreement with the Saarland Government concerning the exploitation of the Saar mines by France for a period of 50 years. The Saarland's coal production is currently estimated at 15 million tonnes per year.

The Ruhr is already under the international control of the allied occupation authorities. Under the new French plan, the International Ruhr Authority would apparently be incorporated in the proposed 'common High Authority'.

The setting-up of a 'powerful productive unit' would lay the true foundation for the economic unification of all countries willing to take part, Mr Schuman said. The increased production and improved quality resulting from the proposed pooling would be offered to the world as a whole without distinction or exception, with the aim of contributing to raising living standards and to promoting peaceful achievements.

'The far-reaching scope of the French plan is apparent from the proposal that negotiations should extend to the living conditions of workers in the coal and steel industries.'

'To achieve this and other goals, such as increased production, improvements in quality and alignment of prices, certain transitional arrangements would have to be instituted, such as application of a production and investment plan, the establishment of compensating machinery for equating prices and the creation of a restructuring fund to facilitate the rationalisation of production.'

Mr Schuman went on to explain that customs duties on the movement of coal and steel would be abolished.

If the plan is accepted, the issue of nationalised industries in France would be one of the problems to be solved. The French coal mines, for example, are currently state-owned, whereas the steelworks are under private ownership.

In response to a question, Mr Schuman stressed that the plan 'was open to every European country in East or West.' When a journalist pointed out that 'Russia is also in Europe', Mr Schuman's reply was, 'Indeed.'

Taking another question, Mr Schuman said the position of West Germany would necessarily have to be established through a joint agreement between the three Occupying Powers, as the Federal Republic was not itself allowed to take decisions on its own foreign trade agreements.

Mr Schuman went on to explain that the US Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, had not yet been informed of the French Government's proposal, as the cabinet had only approved it after Mr Acheson's departure.

He added that this point was not on the agenda for the London Conference but that it might still be raised there.

According to unofficial estimates, coal production in France and the Saarland last year totalled 65 million tonnes compared to an output of 103 million tonnes in West Germany.

Based on the same estimate, steel production in France and the Saarland amounted to 10.8 million tonnes last year compared to 9.1 million tonnes in West Germany. West German production thus closed at 2 million tonnes below the quota allowed under the Three-Power Pact.