

# Reactions in the United Kingdom

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The British Government, well-known for its reluctance to accept customs unions and the idea of supranationality which it saw as contradictory to the principles of democracy, was not given advance warning of the French proposals set out in the Declaration of 9 May 1950. Nevertheless, the United Kingdom was Europe's leading producer of coal and steel. The British Government, vexed at being faced with a *fait accompli* while the United States had been kept informed, was eager to make its grievances known to France.

Clement Attlee's Labour Government, having nationalised the coal mines in order to ensure full employment, was also concerned that unprofitable pits would be forced to close as a result of foreign competition. It also feared that a Europe led by industrialists would pose a threat to the social gains made under the Welfare State that he had been working hard for two years to create.

The clarifications that Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet offered to the British Government after 10 May were not enough to persuade it to join the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The United Kingdom, fearing a weakening of its special links with the Commonwealth, opted for simple association with the ECSC. The Conservative Leader of the Opposition, Winston Churchill, supported the Plan, which strengthened Franco-German relations, even though he did not support Britain's membership.

Apart from a few liberal newspapers that displayed limited support for a sectoral common market, the idea of a European supranational power failed to win over public opinion in Britain. On 3 June 1950, Britain officially announced that it would not participate in the Schuman Plan.

In August 1950, the British Conservatives even submitted to the Council of Europe a counter-proposal for the establishment of a coordinating mechanism at government level, within the framework of a very flexible association of coal and steel producers. Monnet and Schuman condemned the British intergovernmental plan, and it soon foundered. On 28 August 1950, the Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a resolution in favour of the Schuman Plan.