


Political endorsement of the Plan

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The French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman, was convinced that Jean Monnet's idea of pooling European coal and steel output was the right approach, and he therefore decided to assume political responsibility for the Plan. Schuman, a politician from Lorraine (he was MP for the Moselle, a major steel-producing region), could see quite a number of advantages in Monnet's plan:

- it promoted Franco-German reconciliation;
- coal and steel would be managed for peaceful ends;
- it provided a starting point for European integration.

Initially, a high level of secrecy surrounded the issue so that it could not be sabotaged by pressure from employers' and union lobbies, by party political disagreements or the dead weight of the civil service. Outside Monnet's own team, only a small number of dedicated supporters of European integration, including the Ministers René Pleven and René Mayer, knew all the details set out in the proposal. Everything then happened very quickly.

Robert Schuman's first task was to win over the French Government. He submitted a vague outline of his Plan at the end of a cabinet meeting on 3 May 1950. More details, particularly those concerning the institutional implications, were revealed on the morning of 9 May, and this led immediately to a heated debate. Although the Prime Minister, Georges Bidault, had been informed earlier by Robert Schuman, he was reluctant to surrender a degree of national sovereignty. Several Ministers demanded more details. Nevertheless, Schuman finally succeeded in securing Cabinet approval for the Plan. However, he made sure that the French Parliament was not party to the diplomatic efforts for fear of a premature, public debate.