

## 'A new chapter in Franco-German relations' from the Luxemburger Wort (13 May 1950)

**Caption:** On 13 May 1950, the Luxembourg daily newspaper Luxemburger Wort analyses reactions in Luxembourg and elsewhere to the proposal made by Robert Schuman that European coal and steel output should be pooled.

**Source:** Luxemburger Wort. Für Wahrheit und Recht. 13.05.1950, n° 133/134; 103e année. Luxembourg: Imprimerie Saint-Paul. "Un chapitre nouveau dans les relations franco-allemandes", auteur:Verpraet, Georges , p. 1.

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**Last updated:** 06/07/2016

## A new chapter in Franco-German relations

### From our Paris correspondent

In the discussions taking place at Lancaster House, Robert Schuman is a star. There is no place on the agenda for the French proposal for the creation of a new programme responsible for the joint administration of the French and German coal and steel production, a programme in which other European countries — notably Luxembourg — might possibly be induced to take part. But, to a journalist who pointed it out to him, Mr Schuman replied pleasantly:

‘We may get round to discussing it during dessert!’

This is a diplomatic euphemism that should be interpreted as follows: ‘The revolutionary initiative from the Quai d’Orsay will be the choicest morsel of the conference.’

We already know how this plan for a European ‘pool’ of coal and steel has been received in Europe and America. International reactions have, on the whole, been favourable. While reserving his final judgement, Secretary of State Dean Acheson publicly expressed his sympathy and his approval for the direction and the import of the French initiative. In Bonn, in spite of scepticism from the Socialists, this plan has aroused enthusiastic hopes, reviving the idea of Franco-German rapprochement — one that was placed on the back burner after Mr Schuman’s ill-starred journey to Germany in early January. Italy, which produces neither iron nor coal, has already glimpsed the possibility of lowering the cost price of its machinery, its tools and its motorcars. Britain appears to be somewhat shocked by the secrecy which has surrounded the preparation of the French project, but the Foreign Office does not really seem to regard this economic integration unfavourably, even though the Franco-German *merger* could constitute dangerous competition for the British iron and steel industry.

It is interesting to examine what the reaction in France has been among the various levels of public opinion.

We should first of all observe that this is not just a courageous gesture by Mr Schuman. The French Government in its entirety is committed by the step taken by the Foreign Minister: some hours before this plan was made known, the representatives of the MRP and of the Radicals in the Council of Ministers had pledged their support.

Naturally, the whole of the Paris press and of the provincial press have devoted their front-page headlines to underlining ‘the capital importance’ of this suggestion which aims, in the words of Mr Schuman, at rendering any war between France and Germany ‘not only unthinkable but materially impossible’.

From Paul Reynaud to P. O. Lapie (SFIO), everybody realises that, even if French politicians have sometimes been criticised for lacking constructive ideas, the proposal made on 9 May constitutes a contribution which could be decisive to the cause of European Union, or in other words, of peace. After this initiative, which comes three weeks after the still-born idea of an Atlantic High Council which was launched in Lyons by Mr Bidault, it is easy for the leader writer of the *Aube* to wax ironical about ‘the coming indictments of French diplomacy’s ultra-conservatism’.

There is scarcely anyone apart from the Communist Party who has deliberately dismissed the idea of pooling the European key industries. The offensive language in which *L’Humanité* expresses itself does not even have the merit of originality. According to the Communist mouthpiece, it is, once again, a ‘monstrous and cynical betrayal of France, of its independence and of its freedom’. It adds: ‘It is the entire French coal and steel industry that Schuman wants to hand over to the Krupps and Thyssens.’

The general feeling, in France as elsewhere, is that time will be needed to overcome the psychological and technical difficulties, whose magnitude, moreover, Mr Schuman has not attempted to conceal.

It is the Socialists in particular that appear to be worried about the system of company ownership. In his

declaration, Mr Schuman envisaged as the directors of the new organisation 'independent individuals that have been appointed by their governments'. The *Populaire* concludes: 'The individuals that are currently in the running for these posts can come only from the capitalist milieu, and, what is more, where the Germans are concerned, from those that favoured Hitler's accession to power.'

Another mouthpiece of Socialist sympathies, *Combat* asks: 'What will become of the 11 100 000-tonne limit on German steel output?' Talking of figures, we must point out that, although the Ruhr has replaced the United States as France's main coal supplier (300 000 tonnes last March), France supplies almost no iron ore to Germany, contrary to a commonly held misconception.

In spite of all the objections, whether justified or not, that such an audacious initiative will inevitably encounter, it is undeniable that it is likely to open a new chapter in Franco-German relations. It involves, therefore, the future of Europe.