

'Second Chamber on the Schuman Plan' from the Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant (10 October 1951)

Caption: On 10 October 1951, the Dutch daily newspaper Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant ponders the implications of the European Coal and Steel Community for the coal and steel industries of the Netherlands.

Source: Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant. dir. de publ. Baas, F; Pluygers, W. ; RRéd. Chef Rooy, M. 10.10.1951, n° 239; 108e année. Rotterdam: Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant. "Tweede Kamer over het plan-Schuman", p. 5.

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Second Chamber on the Schuman Plan

'An act showing great statesmanlike vision'

The Rapporteurs' Committee of the Second Chamber was virtually unanimous in welcoming the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community. The Committee described this as an act showing great statesmanlike vision. They expressed gratitude to the Government for having liaised so closely with the combined Foreign Affairs and Trade Policy Committees and warmly endorsed the tribute which the Government had paid to the Netherlands delegation and its chairman.

This was the thrust of the Second Chamber's provisional report on the bill to ratify the Treaty signed in Paris on 18 April 1951.

Since it had become apparent that some of the countries involved would not be able to meet the initial deadline of 17 October for the Treaty's ratification because of the difficulties which had arisen, some Members recommended that the Netherlands Parliament should defer taking its own decision to approve the Treaty until the decisions of the other signatory states were known.

There were a number of objections to this from various quarters: the Netherlands would be setting a very poor example for European cooperation if it chose to sit on the fence now.

Looking at the economic implications of the Plan, a number of Members pointed out that the very fact of the Community's creation meant that, in future, after modernisation, not a single tonne of Belgian-mined coal would be being subsidised any longer by the Netherlands and German mining industries. If it were true that only one of the six countries, Germany, was in a position to export significant quantities of coal, it seemed that the Government was happy for our country to import more coal from Germany in the future than in the past. Why was that?

As regards the sums the Netherlands would have to spend on modernising and streamlining the Belgian mining industry, no distinction had been made between the cost of closing down worked-out pits and the cost of modernisation. It was no exaggeration to say that the high level of production in the Netherlands and other countries was largely the result of earlier investment. Thus the Netherlands was not only funding its own investment, but Belgian investment too.

This was all the more pertinent in that the financial climate in Belgium was currently very good and the country was keen to sustain its level of prosperity. It also had to be borne in mind that, whilst the Government was planning to give Belgium 20 million guilders towards better equipment for its mines, Belgium would not be taking part in the Common Market for 5 to 7 years. Lastly, Belgian mines were currently recruiting labour in the Netherlands and offering far higher wages. This would be made still easier within the Community as a result of Dutch subsidies. Did the Government think that this situation was fair?