

'Italy and the Coal and Steel Community' from La Libre Belgique (17 February 1953)

Caption: On 17 February 1953, the Belgian daily newspaper La Libre Belgique considers the position of Italy vis-à-vis the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC).

Source: La Libre Belgique. 17.02.1953, n° 48; 70e année. Bruxelles: Société d'Edition des Journaux du Patriote. "L'Italie et la communauté du charbon et de l'acier", auteur:S., S. , p. 1.

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Italy and the Coal and Steel Community

Moderate confidence, uncertainty, reservations

From our special correspondent in Rome

On 10 February the 'pool' or coal and steel market experiment got underway. However, on 20 January last, Italians had already learned from the *Official Gazette* that the first step toward this market had been the introduction of a supranational tax... In fact concerning this matter, the *Official Gazette of the Italian Republic* published the first three decisions taken by the Community's High Authority of six European countries. These decisions carried the same weight as law and for the first time, this law was not signed by Mr Einaudi, President of the Republic, but instead by Mr Jean Monnet, President of the High Authority.

What are the opinions of various Italian groups about the Community? Government circles are rather optimistic: Mr de Gasperi's government, which has long fought for European union, views this experiment as a first step toward the union of western Europe. Industrial sectors are showing more moderate confidence and recognise the difficulties that are yet to be overcome. Among the press, there is an air of uncertainty and clear reservations concerning the advantages of this market for Italy.

At the same time as the European Coal and Steel High Authority was revealing the terms of the agreements, which came into effect on the 10th of this month, to the media in Luxembourg, the same presentation was being made to journalists in Rome by a high-ranking official from the Ministry of Industry assigned to the High Authority.

From the preparatory period to the transition period

The elimination of customs borders is not yet a reality: we have only gone from the preparatory period to the transition period, a stage which is set to last another five years. During this time, customs duties and other protective measures will continue to be in effect, but over the course of each year they will be gradually reduced and eventually discontinued by the end of the fifth year.

Therefore, we have before ourselves an experiment: one that may however pose the threat of supranational intervention and the possibility that the Community may limit itself to some form of cartel between the industries of the six countries. This does not reduce the importance of this experiment: the success of it may well determine the future of the unification of Europe.

One of the first comments from the Italian groups involved, is that Italy is not adequately represented in the diverse organisations within the European market and that this could be damaging not only to Italy, but also to the Community itself, as a superficial knowledge of Italy's concerns could be detrimental to all. Even though Italy's contribution as a producer of steel and coal is minimal, the Italian market nevertheless consists of approximately 50 million consumers.

The Italian press' scepticism is partly due to the considerable number of unexpected problems that the merging of different markets, previously independent from one another, brings to the table, and to the complexity of the treaty. The creation of a common market, even for a single type of product, is an extremely difficult undertaking when modern countries with complex economic structures, like the six countries of the Community, are involved.

The advantages for Italy

There are conflicting opinions concerning the advantages that Italy could obtain from the common market. One must not forget that Italy imports iron ore for its industries from Algeria because the transportation of scrap iron is too expensive. Algeria was thus excluded from the common market. However, certain Italian experts claim that the implementation of the Coal and Steel Community will allow the Italian iron and steel industry to obtain supplies, especially coal, at lower prices than before; a claim which is nonetheless

contradicted by other experts.

As stated above, Italy imports iron ore from Algeria. Concerning the scrap iron, however, there is one central office within the Community but six other offices are planned, one in each Member State. Maximum prices are also being projected for this material. If the Central Office, instead of assuring free movement of scrap iron within the common market zone, were to transfer its power to outlying offices, it would then be pointless to speak of free access to common supply sources. As one influential Italian newspaper wrote, 'the way it was designed, the "pool" does not free the Italian iron and steel industry from competition from other countries, whether or not these countries are members.'

It was added that, 'the Italian government should keep a close eye on the developments of this first "pool" experiment and it should not let itself be blinded by federalist thought, when dealing with such a vital and fragile economic sector. In the future, Italy could find itself tied into a situation that is advantageous only for those countries with strong iron and steel industries.'

S.S.