

'A prelude to Europe' from Die Welt (11 August 1952)

Caption: On 11 August 1952, against the background of the High Authority of the ECSC taking office in Luxembourg the previous day, the German daily newspaper Die Welt highlights the political and economic importance of European integration.

Source: Die Welt. Unabhängige Tageszeitung. Hrsg. SCHULTE, Heinrich ; Herausgeber KOMMA, Albert. 11.08.1952, n° 184; 7. Jg. Hamburg: Die Welt. "Europäisches Präludium", p. 2.

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A prelude to Europe

Wk. — With the first meeting of the High Authority, the organisation proposed in the Schuman Plan has started work. The tasks and objectives assigned to the European Coal and Steel Community are such that anyone committed to the creation of a European organisation as a means of guaranteeing a free and peaceful existence worthy of human beings cannot but wish it good luck and success. It will — and nobody should be deceived into thinking otherwise — need good luck to be successful. What is about to be undertaken is an experiment unprecedented in history. No experiment is, of course, ever free from risks and the European Coal and Steel Community is no exception.

We first have to grasp what this is all about. There are three key aspects. The first is the attempt, after a war in which all sight was lost of humanity, to bring together states, which only a few years ago were bitter enemies, in a community centred on the heavy industries that embody those nations' armament potential. In that community, maximum security for all participants is to be sought through close cooperation. Control is to be replaced by cooperation, providing the basis for effective equality of rights among the partners. That is one of the main political functions of the Schuman Plan.

The attempt is being made to create a customs union for coal and steel encompassing the continent's principal producers. After the USA and the Soviet Union, it will be the world's largest steel producer. It will account for one fifth of the world's steel output and one sixth of global coal production. It will thus become an essential factor in world politics and the world economy. The full impact of that factor can, however, only be achieved through union in the fullest sense. Such union and the close interpenetration it implies cannot be replaced by the simple aggregation of the production potential of the six signatory States of the European Coal and Steel Community. Furthermore, the creation of this partial customs union is the first large-scale effort to address in practice the decades-old problem of a European customs union, even if only, for the time being, within a limited area. For the first time, we are moving on from theoretical debate to real action.

And finally, for the first time in European history, a supranational institution is being created. Jean Monnet made this point clearly at the High Authority's opening session. Nobody in that body is bound by instructions from his government. Nobody has a right, in that context, to try to gain recognition for such instructions. The members of the High Authority are the first European trustees.

What is happening, therefore, is not just the establishment of an international organisation as that term has hitherto been understood. Supranational, as the word itself indicates, is not synonymous with international. Supranational institutions enjoy sovereign rights transferred to them by the Member States of the union organisation. A new legal form for confederations of states is being developed here. It was taken over from the European Defence Community Treaty and could potentially become the legal form in which the United States of Europe will — hopefully in the not too distant future — be constituted. Whether developments do indeed take that path will depend in no small measure on whether the ECSC proves itself as an organisation.

Commencement of the High Authority's operations is only the first step towards establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community. That is all that has happened. There will be all sorts of difficulties, and some crises are probably inevitable. Sceptics, but also ECSC opponents, should not make the error of interpreting these crises merely as a confirmation of their pessimistic predictions. They would do better to say to themselves that, if this experiment were to fail, free Europe would forfeit a chance to assert itself. And it is not as if free Europe had that many chances available to it.