

‘A framework for success’ from the Luxemburger Wort (9 August 1952)

Caption: On 9 August 1952, on the eve of the inauguration of the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in Luxembourg, the Luxembourg daily newspaper Luxemburger Wort outlines the political, social and economic role of the ECSC.

Source: Luxemburger Wort. Für Wahrheit und Recht. 09.08.1952, n° 222; 105e année. Luxembourg: Imprimerie Saint-Paul. "Les conditions de la réussite", auteur:Fischbach, Marcel , p. 1.

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A framework for success

The Schuman Plan has henceforth created a new common reality as good as any of those treaties that have, throughout history, been so readily concluded and abrogated, those solemn pledges given by statesmen and governments whose commitments are swept away as they fall.

Actions speak louder than words. This is one reason that drove Robert Schuman and the political leaders of five other European countries to build a new reality, from the bottom up, based on the pooling of the core economic pillars: coal and steel. Those two products constitute the very foundation of wealth and technological development in the modern world. Steel broke the heavy chains of slavery, and coal linked every corner — even the farthest-flung areas — of the world. However, in its drive for betterment and modernisation, humanity has created new problems. Steel has subjugated human kind, and the huge furnaces, which have become the Devil's workshops, have plunged our poor world into the depths of Hell.

Nowadays, the peoples of Europe are setting up a coal and steel pool in an attempt to use these two wealth-creating resources more productively. The continued peace and prosperity of every social stratum depend on it. This new Community seemed to be a last-ditch sign from Heaven to the human race — now facing the dangers posed by the discovery of atomic energy, which, if used unwisely, could lead to its ultimate destruction.

Although the Schuman Plan constitutes no more than a first step towards a confederated Europe, it is, nevertheless, one of its cornerstones, since it is both constructive and productive. The Plan sets values, creates economic prosperity and social well-being; consequently, it promotes harmony among the various social classes and fosters confidence at all levels of society.

The treaty process was long and arduous. The clarity of its goals was often obscured by arguments from those, who for domestic political reasons, have used tactics based on opposition and majority-voting. At the end of the day, the treaty was approved by all the parliaments in the countries concerned. Even those that objected to certain aspects of the project could not reasonably claim that the goals of the Schuman Plan were undesirable. The democratic structure of the organisation will help it to secure support from all quarters.

The separation of the three powers, on which the Schuman Plan is based, has stood the test of time in democratic nations and can only serve to provide the foundation for tomorrow's democratic confederated Europe. The High Authority is the executive, while legislative and judicial responsibility fall on the Common Assembly and the High Court respectively. There is also a tripartite advisory committee similar to those of trade associations and chambers. The political institutions of the Europe of tomorrow will need to be based on this same principle, which will remain valid in a world which, for spiritual reasons, remains strongly committed to that guarantee of freedom.

The administrative bodies of the Community in no way breach the rules of democratic freedom. The total independence of the High Authority — the executive body provided for in the Plan — is sufficient for its supranational nature to be safeguarded. For the Assembly and the Council of Ministers will, in the not too distant future, inevitably be the theatre where the influence of national prejudices comes to the fore.

The new Community will have the most positive, even spectacular, impact at economic and social level. It is in these areas that the Schuman Plan, on which the hopes of the masses are pinned, must prove its worth. We are told that the High Authority will be neither free-trade nor central planning oriented, or in the words of Maurice Allais, an exercise in competitive planning. I can imagine, however, that liberal policies will play a role in supporting private initiatives, while centralising measures will have a hand in directing the common market. Does that not mean that the Schuman Plan should create an economy based on Community-wide benefit, which means viable companies and improved prosperity for all, based on the core industries of coal and steel? One of the primary goals of the Plan will have to be increased productivity. The simplistic productivity of the 19th century and the inter-war years is not the issue here. Genuine productivity in a particular industry exists only when it has a knock-on effect on other industries through an increase in the purchasing power of the workers.

Any planning component in the Schuman Plan should be geared first and foremost to a systematic increase in overall productivity. Improved living standards at grassroots level cannot be achieved simply by improving the productivity framework and output in the coal and steel sector alone. This improvement requires close cooperation between the High Authority and the OEEC. The Council of Ministers and the High Authority will have to be guided by similar considerations if it falls on them to determine the allocation of output in times of shortage, whether investment should be made or prohibited or the direction to be taken by the economy of the common market. These same considerations were the building blocks for the safeguard clauses relating to specific countries that were incorporated in the treaty for the entire transitional period.

The High Authority must endeavour to avoid the mistakes of those infamous politicians who built houses and roads only to condemn some of their people to live in ruins. Hurried implementation of the principles of the Schuman Plan would probably result in industrial unrest and economic disruption in one or other these countries, and that would most certainly jeopardise the entire new Community and undermine the credibility of any future attempt to achieve economic integration.

In the new economy, ruin for some cannot create prosperity for others. If the Schuman Plan is to have the kind of social results which it seeks, any plant closures, labour transfer, equalisation of living conditions, wages and welfare legislation are acceptable only where such action is necessary for the welfare of the Community as a whole. If all the Member States which subscribe to the Plan are legitimately to enjoy the advantages of the Community, the Plan must be phased in.

Twenty-five years ago, the great French aviators, Nungesser and Coli, perished at sea because they set out to be the first to cross the Atlantic without the requisite technology. Others are reported to have suffered a similar fate during the same period. Later on, those aviators who made the crossing in two legs did succeed in reaching their destination. Modern technology has made this type of crossing possible, and all manner of aircraft now criss-cross the seas day and night.

The same logic can be applied to the Schuman Plan. The disparities in the technical structures of the various economies mean that not all countries will be on an equal footing at the outset in terms of facilities and targets. Economic growth varies from country to country. A gradual implementation process is required until such time as the various countries reach equal economic status and across-the-board common market policies may be applied to ensure the well-being of 155 million people.

The timing of this move must not be left to chance. However, the groundwork can and indeed must be laid in advance, provided that the approach outlined in the Schuman Treaty informs the actions of the High Authority.

If the Plan were unfortunately to fail, this should not be attributed to the Treaty itself, but rather to the mindset of those responsible for implementing it today.