

Note from the Netherlands Embassy in Rome (3 February 1951)

Caption: On 3 February 1951, the Dutch Embassy in Rome drafts a note on the reactions of the Italian general public to the Schuman Plan.

Source: Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam. NVV - J.G. van Wouwe 1945-1973. Stukken betreffende Europese en internationale organisaties. Stukken betr. het Schuman Plan. 1950-1954. Diverse commissie. 1950-1952, 106.

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Public Opinion on the Schuman Plan — Italy

(Review by the Netherlands Envoy in Rome)

At the time when it was announced, the Schuman Plan naturally gave rise to all sorts of comments, but since then its prominence in the press has dwindled to nothing. It cannot be said that there is any real public opinion on the subject in Italy, but I can tell you what positions certain groups, political and others, have adopted.

The Christian Democrats have from the outset been extremely enthusiastic about the Plan. The reason for this, in my view, is that they feel solidarity with efforts to achieve a rapprochement with French and German Catholics — Robert Schuman and the MRP (Popular Republican Movement), and Konrad Adenauer and his followers.

The socialists (led by Giuseppe Saragat) represented in the Italian Government, as well as the liberals, were also in favour of the Schuman Plan, but for other reasons.

The opposition, in other words the communists and philo-communists, were against the Plan for political reasons.

Also against the Plan — and this is important — were the industrialists, grouped together in the Confindustria employers' association. Although they include a few liberals, it was their private interests that were the overriding concern. The industrialists' objection was that the Plan strengthens the planned economy and attacks private initiative. They also objected to the provisions preventing the formation of cartels. There is clear resistance in particular to the Plan as it has developed under Monnet's influence; as the industrialists put it, they are for the Schuman Plan, but against the Monnet Plan. They do not want anything to do with the High Authority as envisaged by Monnet, in other words a body that is not just supervisory, but actually wields huge power.

I have heard that industrial groups from Italy, France, Germany and Belgium (not the Netherlands) have just drawn up a new Plan, although the Foreign Affairs Department here does not yet know what it contains.

The Government's position may be summarised as follows: it is in favour of the Schuman Plan on condition that it does not have a detrimental effect on the steel industry in Italy, which has to provide work for some 18 000 employees. This is why Italy is urging that French North Africa be included in the Plan or, alternatively, that France should guarantee that if the Schuman Plan does not include French North Africa, Italian industry will be sure to have its raw materials at the same prices as competitors.

3 February 1951.