

'Another step forward' from Het Parool (19 April 1951)

Caption: On 19 April 1951, the day after the signing of the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in Paris, the Dutch daily newspaper Het Parool fervently hopes that the process of European integration will be accelerated.

Source: Het Parool. Vrij Onverveerd. dir. de publ. Van Norden, W ; Réd. Chef Van Heuven Goedhart, G.J. 19.04.1951, n° 1.925; 11. Jg. Amsterdam: Het Parool. "Weer een stapje", p. 1.

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Another step forward

Schuman Plan is signed

After endless bickering, which showed once again how hard it is to get a country to surrender a little of its national power to a supranational organisation, the Schuman Plan was at last signed yesterday by the six participating European powers. As a result France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands have now combined to create a European market in coal and steel. The definitive text of the Plan that has just been signed has not yet been released. It would seem that the negotiations of recent weeks have prompted substantial changes to the original draft. But enough remained to move the necessary process of European unification another step forward. One may say that the process is slow, far too slow, but after all the disappointments over this since the end of the Second World War we should welcome the slightest hint that the process of European integration is gathering fresh momentum.

Now that the Schuman Plan has been signed, the text of the agreement will swiftly be laid before the various national parliaments, and the six signatory countries will have to debate and ratify it. This will show very clearly how far the European idea has advanced. It will probably be hardest for Adenauer, who has to sell the Plan to the German parliament. More than in any of the other signatory countries, the resolution of Western European problems is secondary to national party politics in post-war West Germany.

All the more reason to admire the German Chancellor's courage and determination in securing Germany's support for the new Plan.

Particularly important is the fact that the Schuman Plan envisages not only the establishment of a High Authority responsible for managing West European coal and steel production at the highest level, but also the establishment of a parliamentary body, the 'Schuman Parliament'. This parliamentary body may in due course become more important than the Council of Europe. It will have a very specific remit and, if it is ultimately to have supervisory powers of scrutiny not just over coal and steel production, but also over Western European electricity supply, railway transport and agriculture, its importance may far outstrip that of the Council of Europe, which lacks real powers and so far looks more like a debating club than a true parliament.

For the moment, Britain is not part of the Schuman Plan. All efforts to get the British on board have so far been fruitless. It is to be hoped that they will learn the practical lesson that British interests are better served by close cooperation with mainland Europe rather than continued British isolationism, which has lost its historical relevance in our time.