

## The Schuman Plan and Franco-British relations

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The Schuman proposal took the British authorities completely by surprise. It must be said that at no point during the preparation of the plan did Jean Monnet or Robert Schuman deem it appropriate to approach the British, who they sensed would have reservations over the matter. The secret was so well kept that even René Massigli, French Ambassador to London, was not let in on the plan. However, Massigli was entrusted with the difficult job of outlining the scope of the Schuman Plan to his British interlocutors and, if possible, persuading them to take part. The British reaction was not slow in coming. The British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin — doubtless aggrieved at not having been consulted, while the German Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, and the US Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, had already given their go-ahead — immediately expressed his discontent to his close colleagues. He lamented the attitude of the Quai d'Orsay all the more because the United Kingdom, the occupying power in the Ruhr region, was France's primary partner in Western Union, the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) and the Council of Europe. Furthermore, Britain, a country whose Labour governments had launched a process of nationalisation of the coal, iron and steel industries following the end of the war, was also one of Europe's major industrial powers. In 1949, the United Kingdom alone provided 37 % of the output of the main producing countries in Europe.

The reservations of Bevin, who was already weakened by the disease from which he would die one year later, did not, however, prevent the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, from welcoming the French declaration in the House of Commons on 11 May 1950. For Attlee, the proposal offered a possible solution to the German question and represented a significant contribution to the establishment of Franco-German relations in the future. He saw the Schuman Plan as a way of resolving some of Western Europe's economic problems. In London, an interministerial committee on the Franco-German Authority was established in order to study the possible implications of the French plan, in cooperation with employers' associations and trade unions. However, even though the initial British stance on the Schuman Plan was notionally favourable, there were considerable reservations at the prospect of the United Kingdom's participation in a common, supranational authority. The main arguments are well known. The British were primarily opposed to the prospect of a technocratic organisation with restricting powers which would be liable to intervene in the country's economic policy. They believed that delegating part of the country's sovereignty represented a dangerous point of no return along the European road.

Clearly Schuman and Monnet were determined to break this deadlock, but they were not willing to compromise on the potential supranational nature of the High Authority. And they had no intention of allowing the British to impede the negotiations on the planned coal and steel pool. On 15 May and the days that followed, on the margins of the tripartite London conference on the Occupation Statute of Germany, they held several unofficial conversations with British economic and political leaders, who were keen to find out what the real implications of the Schuman Plan were. But this was not enough to overcome the opposition to the plan, or to dispel the misapprehensions regarding national independence and the methods to be used for the forthcoming negotiations.

There followed a prolonged exchange of notes and memorandums between Paris and London to try to clarify the intentions of the two governments and find a solution to this disagreement. Massigli, who would soon come to side with the British position, and Sir Oliver Harvey, British Ambassador to Paris, were actively involved but despite their efforts were unable to soften the positions or change the attitudes of either side. On 25 May 1950, the French Government sent an official memorandum to the British Government inviting the United Kingdom to join its diplomatic initiative as soon as possible, on the condition that it accepted the basic principles of the Schuman proposal. This memorandum was accompanied by a draft communiqué already accepted by Adenauer and submitted at the same time to the Belgian, Dutch, Luxembourg and Italian Governments. The same day, Monnet sent a personal letter to his friend Lord Plowden, Chairman of the Economic Planning Board in London, in which he described at length the role and powers of the future High Authority.

The British reply came immediately, crossing the memorandum from the Quai d'Orsay. In this first British note of 25 May, Bevin explained that a more thorough analysis of the French Foreign Minister's proposals

was needed in order for him to take a stance. He also rejected the idea of a major international conference in which the United Kingdom would take part from the outset. He called for the immediate opening between France and Germany of bilateral discussions in which the United Kingdom could participate at a later stage in order to obtain further information. On 27 May, after receiving the French memorandum, the British Government stated clearly that it would be unable to take part in discussions which set as a precondition the aim to pool coal and steel resources and establish a High Authority with sovereign powers. Three days later, the French Government, still keen to persuade the British to support its initiative, stressed the reasons why it regarded participation by the British Government in the proposed negotiations — but on the same basis as the other governments — as important. The French Foreign Ministry, emphasising the need to create a community of interests in a limited but decisive field for the promotion of peace and the general improvement of living standards in Europe, was at pains to reassure the British authorities on the subject of the missions and powers of the planned High Authority. But it was to no avail. On 31 May, the British Government repeated that it was impossible for it to commit to a supranational institution before knowing where this would lead in practice. The British therefore indicated their wish for guarantees and a special position in the negotiations on the Schuman Plan.

For Monnet this was too much, and he immediately expressed his views to the French Government, explaining that giving the British a special status from the start would represent a direct threat for the supranational dimension of the coal and steel pool as envisaged in the declaration of 9 May. He believed that the negotiations would have no chance of success if they did not take place between countries which had demonstrated their unity from the outset regarding the aims of these negotiations. The time for prevarication was over. The following day, the Quai d'Orsay asked all the interested governments to give their agreement to a new communiqué which called for the establishment of a treaty that would be submitted for ratification by the parliaments, and which put forward as an immediate objective the pooling of coal and steel output and the establishment of a High Authority. However, with an eye to the future and keen to keep the door open, the French Government stated that it would keep the British Government informed of the progress of the discussions, giving it the opportunity to take part when it deemed it possible to do so.

The British, who saw this communiqué as a sort of ultimatum, still had no intention of letting the matter drop. On 2 June, noting the ongoing 'difference of approach' regarding the basis of the negotiations, the British Government repeated its idea of holding a meeting at ministerial level for the countries concerned. But a few hours later, convinced that the notes exchanged between Paris and London had provided a clear picture of the views of the two governments, the Quai d'Orsay rejected the British proposal, believing that a meeting of this sort would offer little chance of providing further clarification. On the contrary, it considered that such a meeting would postpone the opening of the negotiations without offering any serious possibilities of a convergence of views. Each party held to its position. It was in these conditions that the governments of the six countries which had accepted the Schuman proposal published a joint communiqué on 3 June 1950 in which they gave themselves the 'immediate objective' of pooling coal and steel output and establishing a new High Authority whose decisions would be binding for the Member States. The Quai d'Orsay simultaneously published a communiqué explaining that even though the British Government considered itself unable to join the Six, it would nonetheless be kept informed of the progress of the forthcoming negotiations. But the same day, a British communiqué confirmed for anyone still in doubt that, even though it did not want to reject them in advance, the United Kingdom did not feel able to accept the underlying principles of the Schuman Declaration as they stood.

Believing that a detailed discussion aimed at shedding light on the nature of the plan and all its political and economic consequences was an essential prerequisite to the conclusion of a treaty, the Foreign Office put an end to the diplomatic prevarications by stating that it was impossible, given its responsibilities to the British Parliament and people, for it to be involved in the negotiations due to open shortly between the Six in the conditions put forward by France. The matter was raised again on 13 June 1950 with the publication of the 'European Unity' manifesto under the aegis of the Labour Party's Executive Committee, to which several government members belonged. The manifesto clearly set out the official British views on the question of European unity. The British position was essentially based on three main ideas: Labour did not want to join a Europe that was not socialist; the interests of the Commonwealth and the Atlantic community took precedence over European matters; and international organisation could only be achieved through the

voluntary cooperation of sovereign nations and governments. The brochure, written before 9 May, clearly did not set out to define the British position on the Schuman Plan as such. However, given the controversy that the French initiative had stirred up in the country, the brochure's authors hastily added a passage in which they expressed the need for the European governments to coordinate basic industries to promote the unity of the continent. When asked about this publication, Attlee was quickly obliged to recognise in the House of Commons that he was partly responsible for its production, though he added that he had not known when it would be published.

On 14 June, commenting in Parliament on the publication that day of a collection of documents recording the exchanges between the British executive and the French Government, Attlee restated the same explanations given by his government in the official communiqué of 3 June. The Prime Minister concluded his address by emphasising the progress already made in Europe and the role played by his country in this development, and promised not to do or say anything that might hinder the forthcoming negotiations between the Six. On 26 and 27 June, in a debate in the Commons on the attitude adopted by the British Government on the Schuman Plan, the Conservative Opposition filed a motion signed by eminent leaders including Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden and Harold Macmillan. This called on the government to take part in the negotiations on the Schuman Plan. But the government proposed an amendment to this motion stating that even if it was unable to accept the early stages of the French plan, it remained ready to play a constructive role in discussions on a joint effort. Put to the vote, the Opposition motion was defeated and that of the Attlee government approved. Any hopes of seeing the United Kingdom take part in the conference on the Schuman Plan due to open on 20 June in Paris were definitively dashed.

Two months later, however, something resembling a last stand took place in the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe. Following the address given by Robert Schuman on 10 August in the Hemicycle in Strasbourg, in which he gave his views on the Supranational Authority on behalf of the French Government, the British delegates Harold Macmillan and David Eccles immediately put forward a counter-proposal that was distinctly intergovernmental in nature. In this plan, the High Authority would be practically eliminated, its powers given to a ministerial committee appointed by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. Another important point was the establishment of a provisional and limited right of veto within this committee: during the first five years, any member country could, acting solely on its own behalf, oppose any decisions that it deemed harmful to basic economic, social and strategic policy. A lively debate began in the Consultative Assembly between mainly British and Scandinavian delegates, in favour of intergovernmental options, and delegates from continental countries who tended to advocate federalist positions. On 15 August, the Consultative Assembly decided to close the general discussion on the Schuman Plan, sending the various proposals to the Economic Affairs Committee and asking it to present its conclusions as quickly as possible. These conclusions came on 26 August in the form of two recommendations. The first concerned the procedure for appointing the delegates of the future Parliamentary Assembly of the coal and steel pool from among the members of the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe. The second recommendation called for reports to be submitted at regular intervals from the parliamentary body of the future coal and steel pool to the Assembly in Strasbourg. Even if the desire to see the Schuman Plan extended to all the Member States of the Council of Europe was expressed, the discussions on the French proposal were therefore closed with a relatively superficial twofold recommendation, and the heart of the question would not be addressed until the High Authority for coal and steel was actually established.