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ITALY AND THE SCHUMAN PLAN NEGOTIATIONS

This paper analyses the role played by the Italian delegation in the Paris Conference which took place between the 20th of June 1950 and the 17th of April 1951 and during which the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community was drafted.

A few preliminary notes will deal with how Italy came to join the Schuman Plan and with her negotiating standpoint; that is to say mainly with the interests of her small steel industry.

The main part of the paper is devoted to the negotiating In fact the starting point is the so-called Document sessions. de Travail released by the French at the beginning of the which the ideas behind the Plan finally Conference, in materialized. The work of the principal committees elaborated on its provisions. Thus one section deals with the institutional questions worked out by the most important committee in which the heads of delegation took part. Subsequently the shaping of the Common Market, measures concerning wages and labour migration, and the questions of liberalization and of a common commercial policy are discussed.

In the last section a few questions on the overall significance of Italy's participation in the Conference are

raised.

The whole account is based on original documents coming mainly from Italian archives. The subject of the Paris negotiation has been dealt with very superficially by the literature. In fact most books on the Coal and Steel Community consider the Treaty merely as an extension of the original French proposals, albeit with some correction due to the preoccupations of the smaller countries. For the same reason the role of the Italians has been examined nearly exclusively in relation to some of the particular points they raised - such as Algerian iron ore and labour migration - whereas the part they took in shaping the Treaty has been overlooked.(1)

a) Italy joins the Schuman Plan

According to the conventional account Italy was the first European country to endorse the Schuman proposal of the 9th of May. Sforza is credited for having given a prompt and enthusiastic welcome to the initiative. However, a more careful examination of the facts casts more than one shadow on this shining picture.(2)

On the 9th of May Quaroni, the Italian ambassador in Paris, was summoned by Schuman and briefed on the significance of the announcement that was about to be made. He seems to have reacted rather sharply. An "entente" between France and Germany seemed to him a clear departure from the policy embodied in the Franco-Italian Customs Union. Not surprisingly, Schuman's main concern seems to have been to reassure the Italians that their interests were not going to be neglected.(3)

The endorsement first given by Sforza to the Plan was thus of a very general nature. Of course there was Italy's much publicized commitment to European unification and also its support for speeding up Germany's reintegration into the West. Moreover it was not clear what Italy's position would actually be. At first the French had spoken of the possibility of some kind of association with the new supranational Community. At that stage their only preoccupation seems to have been to secure a binding agreement with West Germany in the shortest possible time. Thus, Italian diplomacy took no part in the first important talks in Paris, London and Bonn, nor were the details of the Plan clearly explained to it .(4)

It was only after the French changed their strategy and demanded the calling of a conference of all the countries that could be seen as accepting the full scope of their proposals that Italy was brought back into the picture. Its response was again a positive one, but a good number of doubts troubled the minds of the negotiators as they approached the Conference table.

For the same reasons, economic circles began discussing the plan only at the end of May and their reactions were possibly

even more cautious and uneasy. A wary attitude was common to the the Ministry of Industry and both the private industrialists -Fiat Falck and the smaller firms in the North - and the State holding company, Finsider, which accounted for about 50% of the country's steel production.(5)

Italian steel output was comparatively very small, although ambitious development plans, financed mainly by the ERP, were being carried out. Production in 1949 amounted to about 2 million tons, compared to the 11 million of France and the Saar the 9 million of West Germany and the 6 million of Belgium and Luxembourg . Consumption was higher and imports had grown considerably in respect to the prewar years. (Half a million tons in 1949, including pig iron). The biggest suppliers were Austria and France for pig iron, Belgium and Luxembourg for semifinished products and sections. The Italian engineering industry, although it had not wholly recovered from postwar reconversion difficulties (especially in the public sector) was quite active and accounted for 20% of the country's exports in 1949.

The Italian market had traditionally been very protected and was also known to be tightly cartelized. Prices were established by the producers' association, although occasionally there were direct interventions by the State. It is difficult to calculate the difference from the prices of the other countries in the pool. There was however a wide gap; in 1949 for sheet, section, bars and plates the Italian internal price was about 50% higher than French and Belgian export prices. Figures were even higher for pig iron.(6)

Protection was provided by a tight system of quotas, and this explains the heavy opposition on the part of the steel industrialists to OEEC liberalization measures. Tariffs provided a second barrier; at the GATT Conference at Annecy, specifically against Belgian pressures, Italy had fixed a tariff ranging from 10% to 23%. It was the highest among the Six, particularly for semi-finished products and pig iron.

There were different opinions as to the best means of in favour protection. Public sector managers were of maintaining a system of quotas that called for heavy governmental interference in the allocation of raw materials and the exploitation of capacity. The private industrialists preferred tariff protection and were supported by the government's cautiously liberal economic policy. The Pella Plan, presented to the OEEC in July 1950, advocated an extremely gradual process of to be achieved by means of multilateral tariff integration, reductions. This should have been followed by the free flow of labour and capital goods, allowing the Italian economy to resume its position on an open international market.(7)

The costs of raw materials bore heavily on the final price of steel. Italy imported most of her coal including all her coking coal, as well as a large part of the scrap needed for the electric furnaces in the North. Iron ore from Algeria was needed for the blast furnaces along the Tyrrhenian coast, particularly for the new ones that were being built at Cornigliano near Genoa. On the whole it was estimated that double pricing for raw materials accounted for something like 11% of the final steel price. Transport costs constituted a further burden. In addition there were other disadvantages such as high fiscal and social charges for the producers and a very low level of productivity, partly counterbalanced by low wages. Surplus manpower, deriving from the strict regulations imposed upon the employers in the postwar years, was considered one of the main obstacles to modernization.

b) The structure of the Community

If any doubts remained on the political significance of the Schuman Plan, Monnet's opening speech at the Paris Conference helped to dispel them. According to Monnet the task of the Conference was to create a High Authority that would embody the idea of a United Europe and at the same time mark a new epoch in relations between nation states. He particularly stressed the importance of building a Franco-German bloc. The High Authority would dispose of enough powers not only to merge coal and steel production - no small matter in itself - but eventually to reshape the economies of the participant countries.(8)

The Italians were rather prompt in realizing what was at stake and they were the only country to entrust the leadership of their delegation to an important political figure. The choice fell on Taviani, a prominent Christian Democrat, closely connected with De Gasperi.

The Document de Travail shortly and effectively spelled out the features of the new allegedly "supranational" body. On a closer look its independence appeared a somewhat far-fetched assumption. The governments were to elect its members as well as its President, who was have a casting vote. What is more, the votes of the countries were to be weighted, and this meant that France, supposedly with the backing of Germany, would be in a dominant position. Members of the H.A were to be renewed, in lots, every two years - a very strange way of supporting their freedom of judgement. Hardly any control on the High Authoritywas envisaged except for an Assembly, whose actual powers were however very weak indeed.(9)

The Italians seemed ready to follow. According to Santoro of the Ministry of Industry, the French document implied the end of national sovereignty, but Italy would not oppose it as long as France would grant her effective representation and acknowledge her vital interests. And basically this was the attitude of the Italian delegation throughout the Conference. (10)

The debate on institutional arrangements was very lively, and at one point endangered the very success of the Schuman Plan. the delight of Spierenburg, leader of the Dutch delegation, To and the dismay of Monnet and Hallstein, the issue at stake was bluntly recalled by Venturini, an Italian official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: in case of war was a national government allowed to push up steel production and move some of its plants? Probably Monnet at this point deeply regretted not having been able to confine the pool to France and Germany, as had been his original intention. Clearly the Benelux countries had no intention of relinquishing their national sovereignty, nor, as it were, their industry, to an omnipotent High Authority . (11)

A compromise was reached by creating two more bodies: a Council of Ministers and a Court of Justice, whose powers, especially those of the former, questioned the central role of the High Authority. The problem of rearmament was dealt with in the context of emergency situations requiring allocation of scarce resources and fixation of quotas. Decisions on plant transfers and priority assignments (civilian against military needs) were left in the hands of the Council of Ministers, with the provision, in the second case, that it act unanimously. The Italians would have preferred majority voting by the Ministers, fearing heavy High Authority interference, but they met with firm opposition from the French and Germans. On the whole, however, the agreement seemed to lean more towards the national than the supranational side.(12)

The Italians were vaguely uneasy with the High Authority but they were not at all sure that their influence would be greater in a Council of Ministers where the strength of national economies was bound to be felt more heavily. They did however come out in favour of widespread rights of appeal to the Court of Justice.

The main dispute was over whether single firms could challenge High Authority decisions. In fact after the creation of the Council of Ministers, which took care of matters affecting national policies, the High Authority had been left in charge of decisions (mainly on prices and investment) previously emanating from single firms, sometimes under the supervision of business associations. It proposed to enforce them through a far-reaching system of sanctions. This was exactly what had led the Belgian head of delegation to say that his government could not negotiate on capacities it did not possess. No wonder then that especially Belgian, German and Italian business representatives – and the French would no doubt have supported them had they been admitted to the Conference -took an active part in trying to check what they defined as the High Authority's "dictatorial powers".

On the face of things the question was left unresolved. Firms were allowed to appeal against any measures affecting them directly, but the Court should not judge the rulings of the High

Authority in their own merit. Again this compromise went some way in meeting the demands of the industrial interests, inasmuch as it seemed possible to circumvent the legalistic framework established by the Treaty.(13)

In the end Italian support for the French bid to shape German reconstruction turned out to be half-hearted. In fact the Italians made it clear that they believed any European arrangement should be firmly linked to the Atlantic Pact. Taviani, on first arriving in Paris, had attacked "third-force" tendencies, clearly hinting at the views held in leading French circles. Monnet, whom Italian Christian Democrats considered to be a dangerous socialist, went out of his way to reassure him during his inaugural speech at the Conference.

Soon after, the Korean War brought up the question of German rearmament. The Italians were in favour of it, believing that it would help to build a better, more eastward, line of defence in central Europe. Thus, in September 1950 at the New York Conference, when the United States demanded the immediate creation of a number of German divisions, the only countries to express immediate support were Italy and Portugal.(14)

About one month later the French counterproposal for a European Defence Community was greeted very skeptically by Sforza. He repeated that Italy was in no way opposed to German rearmament and that, were the French ideas to prove too difficult to implement, they would have to be postponed to a better time. In the meantime it was important to pursue the American plan to build an integrated Nato force in Europe under the command of general Eisenhower. (15)

The attitude of the Italians strained their relations with the French. De Gasperi, however, knowing how difficult it had been to secure parliamentary approval for the Atlantic Pact one year earlier, feared that the French Plans would compel his government to face another debate on military policy, in which the Left, possibly with the backing of a part of the majority coalition, could cause serious trouble.

It was only at the Franco-Italian summit in Santa Margherita in February 1951, after the French had very heavily insisted on seeking a solution in the framework of the countries that had joined the Schuman Plan, that Italian diplomacy began to show a more favourable attitude toward the Pleven Plan. By that time the French proposals had been considerably watered down, in order to achieve a compromise with American views. Moreover, the European Army was now presented as a long-term solution to be negotiated in a Conference, following the one on the Schuman Plan, which had reached its final stage. The French were also prepared to meet Italy's claims for Algerian ore - which had proved one of the most divisive issues at the Conference. Thus, Santa Margherita

seemed to mark the beginning of a new stage in the Franco-Italian "special relationship".(16)

How deeply the European commitment was entangled with motivations of national prestige was revealed once more by the last round of negotiations that took place in April 1951 between the six Ministers for Foreign Affairs, in which the final provisions of the Treaty were fixed. Sforza came forth with two basic requests: that at least one Italian should be appointed on the High Authority and that Italy's position should be recognized as similar to that of the two bigger countries.(17)

The first request was hardly original considering that it was raised in exactly the same terms by Luxembourg . Nevertheless it clashed with the French idea that the High Authority should be composed of only five members. The way was open for an even wider enlargment than the Italians had asked for, and a compromise was reached on the figure of nine members. This was due mainly to German pressures to obtain a solution that would grant them maximum weight. (They obtained two members, as did the French and the Belgians).

Following Schuman's request, the agreement to appoint at least one member for each country was framed in terms of a "gentlemen's agreement", not different from the longstanding one that Monnet was to be placed at the top of the new body. The President, however, though still important, did not enjoy the extended powers the Document de Travail had sought.(18)

On the other main issue -the nature of the weighted vote in the Council of Ministers - the Italian standpoint was bound to coincide with that of the smaller countries, who feared a Franco-German hegemony. After some wrangling a solution was devised whereby the most important decisions had to be agreed upon by at least one of two major producing countries. Italy's desire to be represented on the same footing as France and Germany was met only for the distribution of seats in the Assembly, not a fundamental achievement but enough for Sforza to maintain that the Italian role had been decisive in promoting the Franco-German "rapprochement".(19)

c) The nature of the Common Market

The economic part of the Document de Travail expounded a strange brand of liberalism according to which competition was to be "normal", prices "reasonable" and production "satisfactory". The final judgement rested completely with the High Authority, which was endowed with a vast array of powers on investment, prices, wages and foreign trade, and even covered other areas of economic policy that might in any way affect the functioning of the pool, such as transport, monetary and fiscal policy.

In particular the High Authority was to channel financial resources, and service its loans from a levy on coal and steel products. It would also have been able to allocate raw materials and intervene in the daily life of the firm, a power far beyond that of the Commissariat au Plan in France, not to mention Italy where no central planning mechanism existed.

Behind these proposals lay the idea that, given the highly regulated character of European coal and steel markets, a particularly powerful and enlightened kind of <u>dirigisme</u> was needed in order for an effective alternative to develop.

In other words, according to Monnet, the power of cartels was to be curbed not by free competition, but by more control albeit in keeping with a long-term liberal perspective. Whether this would be enough to dispel American suspicions against European restrictive practices was another matter, but Monnet was rightly confident of winning their approval mainly on foreign policy grounds.

On the whole the construction turned out to be slightly artificial, and this may explain the somewhat incredulous greeting it received from the other delegations.(20)

The Italians were prepared to take a rather limited perspective. Basically they were looking for two points: provisions for investment and adequate transitional measures to protect their steel plants. As far as investments were concerned the Italian delegation was bent on securing approval for the Finsider Sinigaglia Plan, which had very recently and with much difficulty passed a severe cross-examination by ECA and OEEC authorities. The Plan was very coolly received by the French and the Germans. A useful ally under the circumstances turned out to be the Dutch, who had the same problem with Ijmuiden, a coastal integrated steel plant in which the government had taken a large stake. And on the issue finally the Italians scored a success, it being decided that plans already being implemented were not to be submitted to the High Authority.(21) European University Institute Research Repository

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The one other affair for which the Italians were not prepared to leave Monnet's High Authority a free hand was the period of adjustment for their steel production. They wanted a precise definition of its length and its other terms to be included in the Treaty. Again they were not alone. Belgium, taken account of the difficult position of its coal pits, was willing to go much further. It was asking to extend transitional measures over an indefinite period of time.

The compensation measures contained in the Document de Travail in fact offered a ground of confrontation between Italian and Belgian demands for tighter economic safeguards, French rationalizing impetus and German, and sometimes also Dutch, resistance to what was seen as a dangerous and ever-increasing burden on efficiency and low costs.

The High Authority was to manage two funds: <u>perequation</u> and <u>reconversion</u>. <u>Perequation</u> was a price equalization mechanism whereby the most efficient firms would pay for the others to bring down their costs. It was held by the Italians to belong to the "mythological area of the Schuman Plan", it being difficult to imagine for example German producers dispatching "kindly cheques to Falck or Finsider". And in fact very soon in the course of the discussion it became clear that at least part of the subsidizing would take place on a national basis.(22)

<u>Reconversion</u> funds were meant mainly for workers of firms unable to withstand Common Market competition and were also designed to encourage inter-sectorial shifts. They were modeled on the schemes put forth in the OEEC, by, among others, Stikker, which may explain Dutch support for them. On their part the Belgians made a case for diverting these funds to their high-cost coal production, whereas the Italians claimed that they should be given to steelworks compelled to discharge a number of workers in order to maintain competitive costs. This amounted to an unemployment allowance, a measure the other delegations didn't seem ready to envisage. On the occasion Uri kindly advised the Italians to concentrate on labour-intensive activities, leaving steel matters in more competent hands. (23)

The irritation of the French could not conceal the fact that the discussion on social and equalizing measures was gaining a momentum of its own and at the same time arousing German doubts as to the economic feasibility of the whole venture. The second phase of negotiations, starting from September 1950, was divided between writing the final economic provisions of the Treaty and drafting a separate Convention for transitional measures.

Belgian coal proved to be the biggest stumbling block, requiring complex equalization surgery involving the Belgian government and the German and Dutch coal industries. A very minor arrangement was worked out along the same lines for the Sardinian Sulcis coal mines.

At the same time plans to subsidize Italian steel were ruled out, and it was instead decided to mantain a degressive tariff protection for five years. This decision damaged the Italian consumer industries, by preventing them from lowering their costs, but it pleased the European partners, who were quite unwilling to pay another bill, amounting to about one third of the Belgian one; as,for the same reason, it did the Italian budget authorities. The Minister of the Treasury, Pella, was confirmed in his view that tariffs remained the best safeguard against the hardships of integration.(24)

The final arrangements on production and prices contained in the Treaty marked a great change from the original French ideas. On the whole the emphasis now lay more on the the High Authority's role of supervision -information, orientation of the its negative - prohibition market - and on powers of etc - than on its initial assignment of unifying discrimination. production costs through the Common Market. Although the High Authority still commanded considerable influence, for example on investment, it could not, without strict governmental control, deal with matters outside the coal and steel sectors. Basically this was the result of the restraints on supranationalism imposed by the small countries and of a largely shared decision to rely more on current market practice.

Already in one of the opening sessions the German delegation had it made quite clear that the High Authority should encourage efficency and low prices, that it should move as little as possible and take account of the advice of governments, firms and business associations. Thus the stiffening of the German attitude towards price unification, though it is seen in the literature as a consequence of the better bargaining position of the Germans after the Americans had begun to ask for their rearmament, could not have come as a surprise. Furthermore the painful discussion during the winter of 1951 on the issue of German decartelization seriously pointed to the fact that some of the High Authority's powers might remain highly hypothetical.(25)

Finally it was decided to introduce a flexible pricing system which, while still leaving some powers to the High Authority - for example that of setting maximum prices - would

basically allow for differences and leave producers free to adjust.

The Italians had pinned their hopes on the French initial proposal of a "starting point" price, ex-mine or ex-mill, for both steel and coal. However, under the pressure of the exporting countries, a rather different basing-point system emerged allowing absorption of freight in the final price. This meant that transport costs would still weigh on the price of raw materials, while at the same time partly ceasing to protect finished products. The Italian delegation had to recognize the fact that regional prices would have placed too heavy a burden on producers in the crowded industrial zones of Central Europe especially Luxembourg and Belgium - relying heavily on sales in different sections of the market. It had to be content with the exemption of the Italian market from the new pricing system during the transitional period.(26)

d) Wages and labour

The interest of the Schuman Plan negotiation on wages seems to lie primarily in its highly fictitious character. Around a table were seated together civil servants and representatives of non-communist trade unions of the six countries to discuss, for the first and possibly the last time in European history, complete equalization of wage structures.

That was in fact the thrust of the French proposal. In the Document de Travail the <u>parification vers l'haut</u> was essentially designed to cut the advantages of producers relying on low salaries. Its purpose was therefore not so much a social as a productive one, and it was conceived as yet one more instrument in the hands of the High Authority, together with price and quota fixing and investment control.

The role played in the discussion by the trade union representatives is not wholly clear. In fact it seems that, while they were bound by a common interest in gaining some influence over the new Community, on most economic issues they supported the view of their own country's employers. This was all the more true in the Italian case, where the only union participating in the talks was the CISL, a Catholic grouping which had only recently broken away from the Communist-inspired CGIL and was in a very weak position. (27)

The sessions were dominated by a certain amount of incredulity. Common sense suggested that wages were the responsibility of trade unions and employers; nor was it clear how the High Authority could operate without seriously interfering with the whole industrial wage-structure. (28)

The Italian case was an ambivalent one. The industry enjoyed low salaries, by far the lowest among the six countries, but it was also burdened by high social charges, comprising indirect wages such as paid holidays, overtime pay etc, and extra provisions such as family allowances. In this respect it was in about the same position as the French industry. In any case, whereas it stood much to lose from higher wages resulting from <u>parification</u>, it seemed to have little to gain from extending its cumbersome social apparatus to the other countries.(29) European University Institute Research Repository

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This was the situation which led the Italian delegates to take the most logical stand: they declared that low wages were an asset that could not be given up by an industry deficient in raw materials and undergoing modernization. They added that if any equalization had to take place it should concern wage-costs related to a given amount of product, a proposition that could hardly have been taken seriously given the fact that it would have resulted in penalizing productivity gains and encouraging low wages, exactly the opposite of what had been set out by the Document de Travail.

In fact French ideas, which had been cut to meet Franco-German cost differentials, proved incapable of coping with the wide array of different situations in the six countries of the Community. It was clear for example that the Belgian coal mines intended to substitute equalization of salaries for government subsidies. Italy's trade unions, on the other hand, were willing to encourage a social policy but they wanted it to concentrate on the problem of unemployment.(30)

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Most of these plans were gradually shelved under the pressure of Germany and Holland, the two low-cost low-wage countries. The final drafts, therefore, focused on a few measures by which the High Authority could prevent wage-cutting as a means of competition. Some general statements on <u>parification</u> were retained, mostly with the purpose of enticing the trade unions to involve themselves further in the problems of the Community, but on the whole it appeared that the burden of readjustment would rest on high-cost producers, an outcome the Italians, both employers and trade unions, had feared from the beginning.(31)

In September, as the outcome of the discussion on social policies was becoming clear, Taviani raised the point of free labour migration across Community frontiers. The free flow of goods, he maintained, should, in a truly liberal framework, entail the end of all restriction on labour. (32)

As far as the economics of integration were concerned, this sounded a sensible proposition, certainly more sensible than ideas of firms charging the same price in countries with different factor endowment, and different levels of productivity. In practice, however, as the previous experience of Italian negotiators in OEEC and in the Franco-Italian Customs Union indicated, it had proved difficult to implement. Very little had been achieved. The Italians presented migration requests for large numbers of unskilled workers and had been confronted in return with limited offers for skilled labourers in specific sectors, such as farming and mining.

In the coal and steel industries, however, Italy's claims seemed to be supported by the fact that it already exported a large number of workers to Northern Europe. Most of them were unskilled labourers employed -often in dangerous conditions- in the coal pits of Southern Belgium and Northern France or in the ore mines in Lorraine, but there were also skilled steel workers in Lorraine and in Luxembourg. Their number ranged between 70,000 and 80,000, which was little less than those working in Italian coal and steel plants. Thus the Italian negotiators argued that failing labour mobility on a general scale, it should surely have been possible to work out some specific sectorial arrangement.(33)

As it turned out however the labour-importing countries - at the time Belgium, Luxembourg and France, with Holland figuring as an exporter and Germany not yet in the picture - took a very restrictive attitude. They were prepared to accept liberalization on a very limited scale and only for highly skilled workers. In fact this meant that only about one fifth of the workforce would benefit from the agreement, and it would be precisely that section least likely to ask for job transfers. For the rest migration would still have to undergo strict

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national control. In particular it would have to adapt to seasonal shifts in demand in the coal sector.

A further Italian suggestion to allow for inter-sectorial deployment to other industries, or even between the coal and steel sectors, was turned down (although with the possibility of some exception for particular shortages in labour demand). This was hardly a friendly gesture considering the fact that at the time a large number of the unprofitable Belgian and French coal mines, which employed Italian labour, were expected to close as a result of the Common Market.

The French delegation finally proceeded to further cut down the significance of the little mobility that had actually been agreed upon, by assigning its enforcement to an intergovernmental committee. Obviously this was not in keeping with the French overall commitment to the High Authority and its supranational powers.

f) Liberalization

The exact definition of the terms coal and steel involved complex technical issues, and for this reason the work of the committee on nomenclature has commanded very little attention in the history of the negotiations. But it was there that the extent of the actual measures of liberalization was eventually decided.

The Italian delegates fought hard, and with partial success, to exclude from the pool some of the country's high-cost productions such as lignite, coke, various breeds of ferro-alloys and high quality special steels. On the side of finished products they joined the Belgians and, occasionally, the Germans in successfully trying to keep a number of cold-rolled products, such as seamless tubes (of which the Italian firm Dalmine was a major producer), thin sheet and the like, out of the pool.(34)

The vital issue for the Italian steel industry was however the provision of basic raw materials: coal, iron ore and scrap.

In the case of coal it was not easy to say precisely what liberalization would come to mean and how it would affect practices of traditional suppliers in the Ruhr. Decartelization of the Ruhr industry was achieved by the French with active American intervention during the first months of 1951. Its enforcement was left with the High Authority. (35)

While the Italians took no part in these discussions, clearly their interest lay on the same side as the French; in fact access to Ruhr mines had been listed from the beginning, especially by the managers of Finsider, as one of the main Italian objectives. Surely the fact that the High Authority was to take over some of the functions hitherto held by the International Ruhr Authority in which Italy had no voice was an encouraging result. But that this could entail a policy of liberalization must have been difficult to believe in a country in which coal imports had been only partially and very recently released from state monopoly, and prices were kept firmly under government control.

Further advantages for the Italian industry could be seen in the elimination of double pricing and possibly in the reduction of transport costs by the harmonization of rates. Primarily this was to affect rail transport, but rail regulations turned out to be deeply embedded in national discriminatory practices, and it was tacitly agreed to leave them out of the negotiations, and in fact partly out of the High Authority's field of action.

The inclusion of coke in the pool, on the other hand, endangered the small high-cost Italian production, which had developed during the "autarkic period", and its chemical extensions in the field of by-products. In fact, while blastfurnace coke production stood in little danger from German competition owing to its high transport costs, the same was not true for coke used for gas and chemical production.

The demand to keep these types of coke out of the pool was not accepted and this led the Italian producers, under the guidance of Montecatini, to wage a fierce campaign against the Schuman Plan. In the end the other countries were compelled to grant Italy a temporary tariff during the transition period. After steel and Sulcis coal, this was a third case of special treatment for Italy. (36)

Access to the high-quality Algerian iron ore from the mines of Ouenza had been repeatedly requested by the Italian steel industry. The claim had been actively supported by the government on various occasions, as during the Armistice Conference with France in the summer of 1940, or at the Franco-Italian Customs Union talks after the war. On this last occasion the French had failed to be impressed by Finsider's arguments, according to which the ore was vital for the success of the Sinigaglia Plan.(37) European University Institute Research Repository

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In the first weeks after the 9th of May the French had hinted that their Overseas Territories would be included in the pool. Although we know very little on the subject from the French side, probably this was an attempt to lure German investors. Adenauer himself is reported to have told McCloy, the US High Commissioner in Germany, that Africa was one of the main attractions of the Schuman Plan for the Federal Republic.(38)

As soon as the Conference began, however, the French made it clear to the Italians that Algeria would have nothing to do with the Common Market. Sforza and Taviani reacted very angrily. They declared that Italy was seriously considering abandoning the talks, and that, in any case, the Italian Parliament would never

ratify a treaty clearly damaging to Italian interests. On the diplomatic line they turned to many countries, including the United States, for help, but apparently only succeeded in securing very lukewarm German support.(39)

The French had no intention of reversing their decision on the exclusion of the Overseas Territories, but as it became clear that the Algerian issue was seriously endangering the Conference, they began contacts to settle the matter bilaterally.

Algerian ore was exported in fairly big quantities. Export licences were issued by the French authorities and were in fact difficult to obtain. The Italians were asking for over one million tons per year, a high quantity considering their past purchases - a little over 100,000 tons in 1949 -but not exceedingly so when compared to the two million tons that were shipped each year to Great Britain. In fact the British steel industry seems to have watched over the whole Franco-Italian dispute with an anxious eye.(40)

An agreement for five years was finally reached at the Santa Margherita Conference. The French government was to issue licences for increasing quantities of ore, reaching a maximum of 830,000 tons in the fifth year. The actual purchases would have to be negotiated directly with the mining company, but it was understood that the Italians would get the same treatment as the British.

The agreement was included in a foreign policy package which

included, among other things, Italian support for the European Defence Community. It did not, however, satisfy the industrialists, who complained loudly with Sforza and De Gasperi especially about the unsafe terms for delivery. An undertaking on the French side not to invest in coastal steelworks on North African territory was, on the other hand, warmly welcomed by Sinigaglia.(41) European University Institute Research Repository

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The last major point was scrap, of which Italy was by far the largest importer, and a main consumer among the Six. In fact a very high proportion of Italian steel - about 35% in 1949 - was produced from scrap in electric furnaces. Martin Siemens production and even blast-furnaces relied heavily on scrap as well. The biggest scrap consumers were the two main privateowned steel factories, Falck and Fiat, followed by a number of smaller firms, also located in Northern Italy, often specializing in special steels. Thus, the views of scrap consumers were well represented in the Italian delegation.

In the Twenties and early Thirties practically all the scrap had been supplied by France. When the French introduced heavy export controls, the Italian firms turned to the United States. Imports of scrap ranged from 600,000 to 900,000 tons in the late Thirties, and in 1949 they had again attained 350,000 tons.

After the war the United States, whose steel production had

enormously increased, temporarily turned into scrap importers. Germany, whose production, on the other hand, was still lagging far behind prewar levels, had become the main source of supply. The British, who were also important scrap buyers, were largely exploiting it. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Italian industrialists hoped to be able through the Schuman Plan to gain freer access to the West German market as well as to other markets in continental Europe. (42)

Monnet had accepted the inclusion of scrap in the pool. A11 the first official French drafts listed scrap among the raw materials to be fully liberalized. However, the Memorandum sur les dispositions transitoires of the 21 of November surprisingly established that scrap collected inside the steelworks should be left at the firms' complete disposal. This meant keeping out of common arrangement more than half of the available scrap any supply. Moreover, according to the new draft, the rest of the scrap was to be subject to a special regime. Each government was to draw up a list of its own steel industry's requirements and of its home market's availability. The High Authority would then fix the quantities to be delivered to the countries who were in short supply. Export licences between the Six would be retained. (43)

This set of proposals amounted to a firm denial of Italy's demands and, in fact, the Italians reacted very sharply, and were able to appeal to the original spirit of the Monnet proposals. It was absurd, they argued, to consider scrap as being in permanent short supply at the same time distorting all price calculations by restricting its trade. It was in fact easy to show how closely the price of scrap was linked with that of the other raw materials that were going to be pooled.

All this was perfectly sound, but it made little impact on the set of national interests determined to ensure that the scrap market should remain a tightly cartelized business. Moreover, the French, together with the Germans and the Dutch, made it clear in the course of the discussions that they wanted to limit the possibility of large scrap exports to Italian firms, maintaining that they would have the effect of raising the price in their domestic markets by diminishing the supply. The Belgians were on the same side as the Italians, but their scrap requirements were considerably lower.

As an outcome the High Authority was allowed to take over a vast number of controls. Thereupon, as a second choice, the Italians asked that single firms regardless of nationality should be taken into account by the High Authority, both for their scrap requirements and for scrap deliveries to other firms. This would at least have extended the agreement to the whole supply of scrap, at the same time preventing its enforcement along purely national lines.

The French and the others, however, refused to go so far, preferring a solution whereby only the scrap collected outside

steel plants would be allocated, while the rest would be used by the High Authority merely as a basis for calculating the needs of each country.

Clearly what was achieved was a most "uncommon" market, and one which would in any case have to rely heavily on existing private cartels, operating, as they always had, in conjunction with national governments.(44)

Finally there were the discussions concerning the Community's commercial policy. The original French ideas had envisaged a single price for Community steel sold inside and outside the pool. Such a solution, however, soon appeared to be highly unrealistic, given the different value each country placed on exports and given the high degree of competition on third markets. Belgian and Luxembourgian industries in particular opposed attempts by the High Authority to tamper with export cartels.

As soon as the discussion in the committee on tariffs, chaired by the Frenchman Alphand, began, a difference of opinion arose over the degree of protection the Community should afford. The Dutch, followed by their Benelux collegues, strongly opposed the protectionist solution sought by the French, claiming that it would jeopardize their commerce and endanger their balance of payments. Tariffs, they argued, should be set from the beginning and by no means rest with the High Authority. Moreover, there should, possibly, be one single external tariff for the Six. In any case the Low countries made it perfectly clear that they were not going to raise their own tariffs by any considerable amount.(45)

The Italians appear to have attended this phase of the discussion with considerable anxiety. Italy was in the position of a reluctant importer; it had the least competitive industry and most protected market of the Six. Like France, it obviously opposed the creation of anything resembling a free-trade area.

A crucial factor in the second phase of the discussion, starting from September, was the change in attitude of the German delegats, who came out firmly against aligning tariffs on the Benelux level. Given the very low transport costs along the waterways from Rotterdam and Antwerp into the German market, the Germans argued that their trade would be severely damaged, if too low a tariff should be set. <u>Harmonisation</u> - the French word for gradual tariff alignment - would, therefore, have to take place on the basis of the German tariff, which was closer to the French and Italian ones than to that of the Low Countries. (46)

As an outcome, the meaning of <u>harmonisation</u> became ever more vague. Basically it was agreed that, over the years, low tariffs would be slightly raised, and higher tariffs lowered, allowing for a difference more or less equal to the transport

costs between low and high tariff Community countries. This task however was consigned to further negotiations with Great Britain - the major commercial partner of the Six - and with GATT.

On the Italian part this solution was considered reasonably safe inasmuch as it left things more or less as they stood. The Italians, in fact, were preoccupied lest their market be swamped with cheap steel products from Britain and Sweden imported through Belgium and Luxembourg, and they were also concerned to protect themselves from Austrian dumping.

Inside the pool, however, Italy could now rely on the temporary protection afforded by the tariff agreed upon for the transitional period, whereas for goods coming from outside the pool a complex mechanism of quotas was superimposed on Benelux trade in order to prevent re-exportation in the Common market. This did not wholly satisfy the Italians, for it still left open the possibility of circumventing their tariffs by importing through a low-tariff country on the basis of the French tariff, the second most protective one. However, in view of the restrictive framework that was being created, all this seemed highly hypothetical. Furthermore, the treaty did not rule out the imposition of quotas in respect to third countries, thereby leaving governments firmly in charge of commercial policy. (47)

Some final remarks

This brief account of the Schuman Plan negotiations shows the extent to which the French initial proposals were modified. Though we would like to know more about the way in which the Plan was originally drafted, there is enough to be able to say that its aims were extremely ambitious, reaching far beyond sectorial integration. In this respect coal and steel were instrumental to a "spill-over" designed to generate a wider economic and political merger.

How far Monnet and his group could go in realizing their own idea was probably a matter unknown to themselves at the beginning of the Conference, particularly since it was taking place on a much wider basis than they would have liked it to. In retrospect it is easy to say that vested interests were bound to be successful in opposing precisely those aspects of the Plan which seemed to command the greatest political momentum. All the more so if one considers that none of the other countries, with the exception of Germany - hardly enjoying full sovereignty at the time - had shown any willingness to surrender their national independence. This was apparent in the case of the Benelux countries, but Italy's reaction proves no less enlightening. In fact Italy's commitment to the Europe of the Six proved to be a cautious one. The Italians were eager to participate in any new arrangement, they were ready to recognize a measure of French leadership, but they never thought of abandoning the standpoint of national interest.

It would be wrong however to draw the conclusion that nothing was achieved by the Conference. The Treaty in fact laboriously installed a new machinery, revolving around the High Authority, and endowed it with a number of powers formerly held by firms, cartels and national bureaucracies. Certainly if the French were just seeking a substitute for the International Ruhr Authority to allocate supplies of coking coal to their steelworks they could have devised something less complex.

One might argue, on the other hand, that the nature of the new undertaking was far from clear. A Community was undoubtedly taking shape, but what exactly was its relation with the alleged Common Market for coal and steel? The very definition of a common market implied that separate markets were being brought closer together. Clearly the talks on commercial policy had revealed that even a Customs Union was a very distant goal. Moreover it is rather doubtful that eliminating a few restrictions in two industries could by itself be considered as a positive step towards the creation of a single free market.

From the point of view of the planners the outcome was equally questionable. It is true that the High Authority could exercise some influence on prices and investment, exceptionally even on production levels, but was this enough to give it any effective control?

However tangled the theoretical implications of the compromise between dirigistic and free market views, it soon became apparent that the new arrangements would not be of such a nature as to reshape the pattern of heavy industry. Even given the fact that its political implications were quite exceptional, this was not after all the first agreement on coal and steel between European countries. Each country's achievements could therefore be measured against a more traditional background of economic advantages.

In Italy, after the Treaty had been signed, opinions on what had been gained differed highly. Measured against the three main requests raised by Taviani at the start of the Conference – safeguards for investment plans, transitional measures, and iron ore supplies – it is hardly questionable that the Italians scored a success. Whatever misgivings they might have had on some other provisions contained in the Treaty, for example the pricing system, they could rely on a comfortable period of five years for adjustment.

Other important points, such as better access to coal and scrap, still awaited practical solutions. A traditional argument points to the successful performance of the Italian steel industry in the Fifties and Sixties as ultimate proof of the advantages it gained from joining the Coal and Steel Community. There must be some truth in this argument, but a safe historical

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assessment would have to deal with how matters discussed during the Conference were then worked out in practice - a task that goes beyond the scope of this paper.

What the minutes of the negotiating sessions do reveal is the extent to which a complex pattern of transactions between national interests succeeded in reshaping the original French proposals. Even the minor actors played quite a significant role, sometimes by merely advancing their requests. How much, for example, did the emergence of a less "dirigiste" and more flexible Community owe to the reactions to Italian and Belgian pressures on the social resources of the Community, or to the insistence on national controls by the Benelux countries and on investment safeguards by the Dutch and the Italians?

On the whole Monnet's statement that the delegations operated in a European spirit cannot be completely dismissed. The Governments had committed themselves to a Plan from which it would have been no simple matter to retreat. The French having shown the way, the delegations - certainly the Italian one - took good care to present their demands as something more than just nationalistic claims. This helped to promote reasonable compromises.

The initial standpoints were very different, but soon delegations found themselves in contradiction with their original aims; the Belgians for example seem to have become fervent supporters of supranational compensation measures and the French retreated more than once to a national approach. New areas were introduced into the discussion or outgrew their original scope - scrap policy and labour <u>readaptation</u> are two good examples.

The new Community took over the task of carrying out the agreements sketched in the Treaty. The Conference had shown that this could be done through slow and patient discussion. Thus the High Authority, far from embodying the idea of Europe, could probably command barely enough influence to promote a new working relationship between the industries of the Six.

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