

The Spaak Committee

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The Spaak Committee

From 9 July 1955 to 21 April 1956, a working party, composed of delegates from the six governments and chaired by the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Paul-Henri Spaak, undertook the task of drawing up a report which would sketch the broad outline of a future European Economic Community (EEC) and a European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC).

In October 1955, although it had participated in the first preparatory sessions, the United Kingdom decided to play no further part in the work of the Spaak Committee, whose chances of success it saw as slight and, at all events, not altogether desirable. The British opposed a customs union because they wanted to maintain their autonomy with regard to the setting of tariffs, protect their industries and maintain the privileged links that they enjoyed with their Commonwealth partners. Besides, Britain, which had had the atomic bomb since 1952 and was already financing nuclear research programmes with the United States and Canada, did not want to compromise that fruitful collaboration by associating itself with Euratom.

The working party, whose meetings were also attended initially by representatives of the High Authority of the ECSC, drew up a *Report of the Heads of Delegation to the Foreign Ministers*, which served as the basis for negotiations during the conference of the six Ministers for Foreign Affairs, which was held in Venice on 29 and 30 May 1956.

The work of the Spaak Committee answered the questions raised at the Messina Conference about the choice between a general common market and partial sectoral integration. It also pointed out ways of attaining the objectives set by the Ministers. Taking the experience of the ECSC as an example, the report went beyond supporting a simple liberalisation of trade and recommended a general customs union with a common external tariff. It did not exclude a single industrial or agricultural product.

The Spaak Report concluded that sectoral integration would be difficult. A vigorous programme of integration in the field of nuclear energy seemed, in spite of everything, to be absolutely vital, because nuclear research and development were so very costly and, consequently, difficult for any single State to undertake on its own. In practice, integration meant that costs could be shared more effectively. This recommendation seemed, however, not to be applicable to other sources of energy. In fact, integration of the hydrocarbon industry proved to be impossible, as products were almost exclusively distributed by multinational companies. As for the integration of electricity and gas, it seemed, in contrast, to be irrelevant, since these forms of energy were distributed on a national basis.