

## The signing of the Rome Treaties

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## The signing of the Rome Treaties

Meeting on 25 March 1957 in the Hall of the Horatii and Curiatii in the Capitol in Rome, the representatives of Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands signed the Treaties establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom). Wanting to commit themselves to an irreversible process, the Six did not provide for any specific duration or a procedure for withdrawal in the Treaties. However, the aim of the Treaties — beyond economic integration — remained relatively vague. According to the Preamble, they aimed, in particular, to ‘lay the foundations of an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe’, but the form of this union was not specified.

All the ratifications were secured by late 1957, and the Treaties entered into force on 1 January 1958. In the interim, they had been supplemented by Protocols signed in Brussels on 17 April 1957 and drawn up in Val Duchesse by the Interim Committee chaired by Baron Jean-Charles Snoy et d’Oppuers, Head of the Belgian Delegation to the Intergovernmental Conference on the Common Market and Euratom. These additional agreements determined the status of the Judges and the Advocates General, the organisation and procedure of the Court of Justice of the EEC and of Euratom and the privileges and immunities of the EEC and of Euratom.

From an institutional point of view, the EEC and Euratom largely followed the same operational procedures as the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), although their supranational nature was less pronounced. In 1950–1951, the six founding countries of the ECSC wanted to establish a decision-making authority independent of national governments, hence the supranational character of the ECSC’s High Authority. The powers of the High Authority encroached considerably upon those of the national governments, who consequently lost some of their powers of control over their countries’ economic and social activity in the coal and steel sector. However, in practice, the Special Council of Ministers of the ECSC soon acquired a more prominent role than initially expected.

Three years later, during the negotiations on the Common Market and Euratom, the governments of the Six demanded the right to intervene in future Community decisions. France, in particular, not wishing to revive the dispute over the European Defence Community (EDC), found it extremely difficult to agree to an increase in supranational powers. The symbolically-charged term ‘High Authority’ was, therefore, abandoned. The French Delegation insisted that the decision-making powers of the two new Communities be conferred on the Council of Ministers and that the Assembly have no legislative powers. In the Treaties, supranationality was therefore limited to the strict minimum required to ensure the smooth running of the new institutions. This time, instead of proposing an authority independent of governments, the negotiators provided for an executive body which had to take the common will of the Member States into account. Nevertheless, a certain element of supranationality was maintained: the EEC and Euratom Commissions, consisting of independent figures, were granted an exclusive power to submit proposals for legislation to the Council, and the Council had the possibility of gradually moving from unanimous voting to majority voting, using a system of weighted votes to ensure that the ‘small’ countries would not be dominated by the ‘large’ countries (four votes each for France, the FRG and Italy, two votes for Belgium and the Netherlands and one vote for Luxembourg, with the majority set at 12 votes out of 17). The EEC and Euratom Commissions both operated on a collegiate basis, taking their decisions by a simple majority. They were the guardians of the Treaties and ensured their proper implementation. Unlike the Council, they were accountable to the European Parliament, which could remove them from office with a two-thirds majority.

From that point on, the three Communities — ECSC, EEC and EAEC — had a single Court of Justice, which was the guardian of the law in the application and interpretation of the Treaties. It resolved cases between the Member States and between Member States and Community institutions and heard appeals against Community institutions. The three Communities also had a single Parliament consisting of national representatives, with the Treaty providing for their election by universal suffrage if the Council so decided unanimously. An Economic and Social Committee (ESC), common to the EEC and to Euratom (the ECSC retained its Consultative Committee) and consisting of representatives of the various sectors of economic and social life, had to be consulted on certain matters by the Council or the Commission, as did Parliament

which, in 1958, adopted the name European Parliamentary Assembly. Finally, the European Investment Bank (EIB), established only by the Treaty establishing the EEC and not common to the three Communities, was set up to finance projects which were directly associated with the implementation of the Common Market, particularly in regions where the economic sector was experiencing difficulties.