

The European Political Community

Source: CVCE. European Navigator. Étienne Deschamps.

Copyright: (c) CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.

Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/the_european_political_community-en-8b63810a-e5bd-4979-9d27-9a21c056fc8d.html

Last updated: 08/07/2016



The European Political Community

In parallel with negotiations on the shape of the European Defence Community (EDC), the idea of a European Political Community (EPC) was developed. For, having abandoned all hope of ever seeing the Council of Europe become a real European political authority, the pro-Europeans among the Six looked for a new way of ensuring the development of a European political statute affording leadership and democratic control over the future European army. Accordingly, after the signing of the draft Treaty establishing the EDC on 30 May 1952, the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe asked the six governments to confer on the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) — destined to become the Assembly of the future EDC — the responsibility for drawing up a plan for an EPC.

On 23 July 1952, without even waiting for the EDC Assembly to take up office, the governments of the Six entrusted the ECSC Assembly — chaired by the former Belgian Foreign Minister, Paul-Henri Spaak — with the task of drafting a European political statute within six months. However, in order to conform to the draft EDC Treaty, the ECSC Assembly had to be enlarged to include the required number of delegates laid down for each country in the future EDC Assembly. Three delegates each from Germany, France and Italy were immediately co-opted to the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe. The new body thus constituted took the name of the Ad Hoc Assembly, meaning that it had been formed to carry out that particular task. A Constitutional Committee, chaired by the German delegate, Heinrich von Brentano, was immediately appointed within the Assembly.

From that time on, the Constitutional Committee reflected on those institutions which were to constitute the future European Political Community. A Constitution was drawn up along parliamentary lines, one which had clear federalist leanings. The Ministers actually planned the establishment of a bicameral parliament, comprising a Chamber of the Peoples elected by direct universal suffrage, and a European Senate appointed by the national parliaments. Parliament would not only have control over the executive but would also be able to act as a genuine legislative body, a function which, until then, was the exclusive prerogative of the Council of Ministers of the ECSC. The Ad Hoc Assembly also proposed the establishment of an Executive Council, which would effectively be the government of the Community and responsible to the Chamber of the Peoples and whose President would be chosen by the European Senate. Furthermore, the Constitution included a plan for the establishment of a Court of Justice and an Economic and Social Council.

The development of this ambitious project also provided the Netherlands — whose very open economy was strongly orientated towards export — with the opportunity to propose the establishment of a common market among the Six, a market with neither customs duties nor quotas. In December 1952, the Netherlands Foreign Minister, Jan Willem Beyen, asked his counterparts to consider giving the future EPC a significant economic dimension by setting up a non-sectoral single market within which products would be able to move freely under the guarantee of a supranational authority. A common market for goods of all kinds appeared, however, to be far too risky for several countries, since they found it difficult to relinquish their protectionist tradition.

Adopted almost unanimously by the Assembly in March 1953, the draft Treaty was immediately put before the six Foreign Ministers of the ECSC. Reactions were, however, rather guarded. Some thought that it was necessary first of all to set up the EDC before being able to tackle the establishment of a political community. Others deplored the dominance of parliamentary power and proposed the drafting of a new plan that would divide legislative power between the Executive Council and the Council of National Ministers. The plan then became the subject of lengthy diplomatic negotiations, which gradually tailed off. In the end, the refusal of the French National Assembly on 30 August 1954 to ratify the Treaty establishing the EDC automatically led to the plan for a European Political Community, of which it was the institutional corollary, being abandoned.