

'A Europe grounded in reality' from Le Monde (26 March 1957)

Caption: On 26 March 1957, the day after the signing of the Treaty of Rome establishing the European Economic Community (EEC), the French daily newspaper Le Monde examinesconsiders the issues at stake inimplications of the establishment of the European Common Market and Euratom by the Treaties signed the previous day in Rome by the Foreign Ministers of the Six.

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A Europe grounded in reality

The Treaties establishing Euratom and the Common Market have been signed in Rome 22 months after the Messina Conference that had sought to open up new ways forward for Europe. This is not such a long time, given the number and complexity of the issues covered by the Treaties and their root-and-branch impact on the economies of the Six.

With hindsight, the failure of the European Defence Community seems to have sparked greater enthusiasm amongst the architects of this Europe 'Mark 2'. At least it has taught them what not to do if they want to succeed. Since the start of the preparatory talks, the delegates have been learning how to deal with the real world. The experts and their political masters, rather than attempting to hide the problems in a superbly designed edifice and searching for a European golden mean, have strived instead to come up with a plan that encroaches as little as possible on national prerogatives.

From an intellectual point of view, the Euratom and Common Market Treaties cannot compete with the Civil Code. Part 6 of the Treaty 'establishing a European Economic Community' and entitled 'General and final provisions', is a strange hotchpotch of rules and exceptions to those rules and of principles that are valid in the transitional period and all the others. This necessarily weakens the structure of the text and even the scope of the Treaty. At least, the safeguards that have been incorporated allow us to hope that the grand design for Europe will not be a game in which one side wins and the other loses.

Both in the case of Euratom and of the Common Market, the experts' caution was demonstrated by their shunning of supranational systems wherever possible. The real power in Europe will lie with the Council of Ministers of the Six. This means that there will be a intricate system of power-sharing between this body and the European Commission, but at least there is the guarantee that individual nations will forfeit only the minimum degree of sovereignty required for the effective implementation of the Treaties.

Before agreeing to sign the Treaty, France, aware of the weaknesses in its own economy, demanded and secured other guarantees that also weaken the orderly dismantling of customs regimes. In the end, our partners had to accept that this was the price for ensuring that our Parliament could ratify the Treaty.

As it now stands, the Common Market Treaty seems to meet the 'demands' set out in the three-point agenda that was adopted by 322 votes to 207 on 23 January. It explicitly endorses the agreements reached by the experts on the issue of harmonising wage and salary costs. This is set out in black and white, in the final part of the Treaty. French parliamentarians also obtained satisfaction on the agricultural chapter. Lastly, the Treaty resolves the third thorny issue, the inclusion of the Overseas Territories, as sought by the agenda terms 'on the basis of the principles put forward by the government.'

The majority parties, which stated their support for the Common Market on these terms, can hardly now, just a few months later, change their position. Similarly, with regard to Euratom, the main objections that were raised during last July's debate should be overcome, since France is allowed to manufacture atomic weapons and has been given priority for the use, in national programmes, of the fissile material which it produces itself. There are still questions, however, about how such complex treaties will be implemented. The French economy, in its present form, operates according to a logic that is totally at odds with that being proposed for Europe. Just as Mr Pineau is signing the Common Market Treaty, Mr Ramadier is strengthening measures against imports and is even defying ECSC rules by requiring that a bond be deposited for all purchases of coal from our partners. Things do not look good for the launching of Europe! Will a way be found to overcome these contradictions before 1 January 1958 when the Treaties are likely to come into force?