

Alfred Müller-Armack, On the road to Europe


Caption: In his memoirs, Alfred Müller-Armack, former member of the German Delegation to the Intergovernmental Conference on the Common Market and Euratom, recalls the ceremony, held in Rome on 25 March 1957, to mark the signing of the Treaties establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom).

Source: MÜLLER-ARMACK, Alfred. Auf dem Weg nach Europa, Erinnerungen und Ausblicke. Tübingen; Stuttgart: Rainer Wunderlich; C.E. Poeschel, 1971. 267 S. ISBN 3 8052 0202 4. p. 124-130.

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/alfred_muller_armack_on_the_road_to_europe-en-67c9b431-8fc1-4ad7-b9aa-48228cd220b8.html

Last updated: 05/07/2016



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On Monday 25 March 1957 at 6 p.m., the signing of the Treaty of Rome took place on the Capitoline Hill. The exertions and strains of two years of negotiations were behind us. They had led to the success of which we ourselves were not initially sure. The outside observers, from Great Britain in particular, who had not believed in it and had therefore taken a wait-and-see attitude, capitulated in view of the new situation. As early as 13 February 1957, the member states of the OEEC and the Six took the decision to begin negotiations in order to ‘create a free-trade zone in Europe, in which the Common Market of the Six is associated with the other member states on a multilateral basis.’

On that March day in 1957, the Hill adorned with venerable buildings, the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius and a copy of the Capitoline she-wolf was the scene of a European event for which the city of Rome was pleased and proud to supply its incomparable backdrop. The treaty that had been prepared in Brussels and occasionally also in Paris therefore went down in European history as the ‘Treaty of Rome’. The surroundings for this glamorous signing were quite unique. Receptions in the Villa Massimo alternated with others in Italian gardens. In spite of the inclement weather on the evening of the signing ceremony — the rain was pouring down — schoolchildren lined the approach road waving the flags of the partner countries. The bells rang out. The kiosks were adorned with posters whose design was heartfelt rather than artistic in intent: six peasant girls in a circle, wearing aprons in the various national colours, dancing to celebrate the occasion. I have subsequently often noticed how much more deeply rooted the feeling of belonging to a great European organisation is in Italy than it is in Germany, for example, where, in fact, only a limited group among the elite has developed a Europe awareness.

The signing was performed in what is known as the Hall of Heroes in the Capitol, a huge, elongated reception room which, on the long side facing the windows, was covered by a huge fresco of Roman mythology, showing heroes of ancient times wrestling with one another — and in front of them at the signing table there were the promoters of a peaceful community of the powers of Europe. The most prominent in their ranks were: Konrad Adenauer, Joseph Bech for Luxembourg, Paul-Henri Spaak for Belgium, Antonio Segni and Gaetano Martino for Italy, Maurice Faure for France and Joseph Luns for the Netherlands. The ceremonially sealed documents were presented in accordance with the set ritual to the representatives of each country for their signature. The window side of the room, and this was, thank God, not shown on the splendid photographs of the event, was crammed with a crowd of reporters and their cameras and lighting rigs, all intent on capturing the procedures of the historic moment. Admittedly it was not the text volumes of the treaties that were signed, but just the signatory annex to the treaty itself. The rest was blank paper. As is often the case when important international treaties are concluded, frantic efforts had been going on right up to the day of the signing to work out formulations for matters that had been brought into the discussions at the last minute and gave rise to a general anxiety that the whole treaty might ultimately be jeopardised. From the German side, there was the declaration that the Federal Government regarded economic relations with the GDR as a part of its internal trade, a declaration of undoubtedly enormous political significance, which was soon accepted by the five partners. Not a little dust was stirred by the intention that the now three existing European communities, the Coal and Steel Community, the EEC and the EAEC, should jointly develop a coordinated European energy policy on behalf of their commissions. The chronicler notes that this project, a task set in 1958, has, to this day, not been promoted by one single measure. There were arguments as to competences, but the work was subsequently left untouched — and this is, by the way, a not uncommon experience.

In the brief addresses given by the Heads of Government immediately after the signing, Konrad Adenauer stated: ‘The European Community will pursue only peaceful aims, and it does not oppose anyone. It is prepared to work with any other state. Membership is open to all European countries. If a state does not believe that it can become a full member, we have made provision for the establishment of other means of cooperation — in particular by the creation of the free-trade zone. We in the Community wish to maintain and increase free trade with every country in the world, in line with the tradition of our countries. Our goal is peaceful progress in cooperation with others.’

The European Economic Community was thus endowed with the desire for a comprehensive and larger Europe. The obstacles which still lay before the attainment of this goal could not spoil the justified joy that here, for the first time, six countries had been successful in negotiating a transition to common economic and later, it was hoped, also political action.

The signing had to be followed by ratification by the individual national parliaments. After completion of the work to coordinate the translations of the legally binding treaty into all four languages of the Community, we went into the parliamentary discussions, armed with the extensive volumes of the treaties that had been negotiated. The task of representing these before the parliamentary committees was allotted in particular to the Junior Minister in the Foreign Ministry, van Scherbenberg, and to me. We clarified each of the essential passages of the Treaty. The Members of Parliament, used to amending government drafts often to such an extent that they became unrecognisable, were under the impression that they would be able to act in a similar fashion here. They quickly had to realise, of course, how different their options were in this case, where they were dealing with a large, internationally negotiated package, firmly tied up by compromises and sensitive areas, the imposing result of two years of negotiation work in which the deletion of even a single article would have jeopardised very many others. It is hardly possible to create international treaties using parliamentary methods. They can only be accepted or rejected as an overall concept. The work carried out in Brussels proved to have been so carefully considered, even in the eyes of the Members of Parliament, that their concern at not being properly involved was soon overcome. The CDU and the SPD declared their full agreement. The FDP caused some difficulties. I had an opportunity to attend a meeting of the parliamentary party chaired by the then Chairman, Reinhold Maier, in order to report to them on the substance of the EEC Treaty, and I gained the impression that I had been more or less successful in convincing them. I was, therefore, surprised that their response, at least in part, was to reject the Treaty in a vote taken simply on a show of hands. However, this could not affect the approval of the Treaty by an overwhelming majority in the Bundestag.

The Bundestag ratified the Treaty on 5 July 1957. The Bundestag linked ratification to a declaration in which it stated itself expressly in favour of the association of the other European countries in the form of a free-trade area. The other countries followed with their ratifications, albeit with somewhat greater delay. The fear that the EEC Treaty, like the earlier treaty on the Defence Community, might fail at the final hurdle proved to be groundless. The Treaty of Rome came into force on 1 January 1958. The European Economic Community was able to begin setting up its institutions and to enter the transitional phase provided for by the timetable in the Treaty.

If we look back at the circumstances leading to the success of the efforts towards European integration made among the Six, it will surely be seen that there were always extraordinary circumstances associated with its genesis. It may be said quite generally that even large-scale changes require circumstances or people that are in advance of the general trend of public opinion. For example, the transition of the Federal Republic itself to currency reform and to abolition of controls in 1948 was a step that was initiated by only a small group of economists and a leading economic politician, Ludwig Erhard, and it was only their success that was able to win over public opinion and MPs to a positive viewpoint. The Coal and Steel Community came about as a result of the political concept of Robert Schuman and the understanding attitude of statesmen such as Adenauer, De Gasperi and Monnet. The EEC Treaty is also the creation of a relatively small group of politicians and negotiators. It would surely be an exaggeration to suggest that the creation of political unification in the EEC was the result of Cold War pressure from the East. However, the events of 1956, with the Hungarian uprising and the Suez adventure of the British and the French certainly did play a part in breaking down the final remnants of doubt and resistance.

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