

'Europe at the pace of Benelux?', from Luxemburger Wort (3 June 1955)

Caption: During the Conference held in Messina from 1 to 3 June 1955, attended by the Foreign Ministers of the six Member States of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the Luxembourg daily newspaper Luxemburger Wort speculates on the direction that European integration should take.

Source: Luxemburger Wort. Für Wahrheit und Recht. 03.06.1955, n° 154; 108e année. Luxembourg: Imprimerie Saint-Paul. "Europa im Beneluxschritt?", auteur:M. F. , p. 1.

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Europe at the pace of Benelux?

At the time of writing, no details on the Messina Conference's potential consequences for European integration are yet available.

The Conference has, with René Mayer, a man with a reputation as a committed 'European', placed a radical from the party of Pierre Mendès France at the head of the European Coal and Steel Community's High Authority. As a radical, René Mayer voted in parliament for the European Defence Community (EDC) and the Paris Agreements. In the North Africa debate, he failed to back Mendès France and consequently no longer enjoys his party's undivided support.

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In Messina, it did not worry anyone that René Mayer is a member of the French National Assembly. Nor did the High Authority take exception to this, announcing yesterday that it had unanimously elected the High Authority's new member as its President. It is now up to the National Assembly itself to decide whether the newly appointed President of the European Coal and Steel Community's High Authority can keep his seat in parliament. If the decision went against him, Mr Mayer's membership of the High Authority would, in turn, be under threat. Conversely, reservations have already been expressed as to whether a serving member of parliament would have the freedom of manœuvre required to head a supranational institution such as the Coal and Steel Community. Only time will tell.

It might, perhaps, be thought that the pace of European integration will, on the whole, be slowed down because the Messina Conference did not re-elect Jean Monnet, whose views on European integration are common knowledge and do not give its supporters cause for concern.

It would, however, be a mistake to draw such a conclusion. The reason why Jean Monnet was not asked to continue as President of the High Authority was, no doubt, that he waited too long before announcing his willingness to stay on and, when he did eventually do so, made it a condition that European integration be pursued along the lines of the Benelux project.

The governments were, however, neither able nor willing to give such a guarantee to the outgoing President of the High Authority. According to reports from Messina, there seems little prospect that, in other areas, integration will move forward on the model of the European Coal and Steel Community, with the creation of specialised supranational authorities. The prevailing opinion appears to be that slow but steady progress towards European integration is the most effective way of ensuring the ECSC proves fully successful.

A general consensus should be forthcoming on this point, though not necessarily on how integration should be relaunched. There is, first of all, the Benelux Plan that basically aims at creating a common economic market in Europe. From what has already leaked out about this project, the Benelux states see integration primarily in terms of economic coordination and the emergence of a customs union on the road to a common European market. The political issue of new institutional forms tends, on the other hand, to be left in abeyance. All the signs are that Europe is to be brought, ultimately, to a common denominator on the Benelux model. Such an undertaking is, on the whole, to be welcomed, although the Benelux experience itself indicates that, with such an approach, progress is generally tentative and piecemeal. Benelux is still at least 10 years away from the common market, not least because of the lack of a supranational institution empowered by specific treaty provisions to take binding decisions on its own initiative.

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Integration on the Benelux model ought to be agreeable to the individual states precisely because adequate account will, in this way, be taken of their national interests.

Moreover, such a method of European economic integration does not necessarily preclude partial integration under a supranational authority in certain areas, such as atomic energy.

Although a continuation of European integration on the Benelux model would not give excessive cause for hope, any form of progress towards integration would seem preferable to stopping the entire process so as not to concede partial supranational integration.

Economically, Europe has to achieve greater unity. This will only be possible if borders are removed and a common market is established. If such a market can become reality without a supranational authority, this does not mean it would have to lag behind another common market in actual effectiveness.

M. F.