

## 'Europe with limited liability', from Süddeutsche Zeitung (2 June 1955)

**Caption:** On 2 June 1955, the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung outlines the issues on the agenda of the Conference which was held from 1 to 3 June 1955 and was attended by the Foreign Ministers of the six Member States of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC).

**Source:** Süddeutsche Zeitung. Münchner Neueste Nachrichten aus Politik, Kultur, Wirtschaft, Sport. Hrsg. FRIEDMANN, Werner; GOLDSCHAGG, Edmund; SCHÖNINGH, Dr. Franz Josef; SCHWINGENSTEIN, August ; Herausgeber Friedmann; Werner. 02.06.1955, n° 129; 11. Jg. München: Süddeutscher Verlag. "Europa mit beschränkter Haftung", auteur:Schuster, Hans , p. 1; 2.

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## Europe with limited liability

by Hans Schuster

Surely no one expected any political sensations when the Foreign Ministers of the six Member States of the European Coal and Steel Community began their conference on Wednesday in the shadow of Mount Etna, the volcano on the edge of Europe. All had gone quiet, in fact, on the European front. Alcide De Gasperi, one of the great promoters of integration, is no longer with us. His Belgian colleague, Paul-Henri Spaak, has had to devote most of his attention to the business of national government. Robert Schuman is no longer at the forefront of French politics. His efforts to create a new political platform for Jean Monnet, the inspiration behind the Schuman Plan, appear to have failed. On the other hand, the Federal Chancellor, the last of the old guard, is the only one of the Foreign Ministers who has sent a deputy — his State Secretary, Walter Hallstein — to represent him in Messina.

Nothing characterises the state of Western European integration more aptly than the melancholy words that Mr Monnet addressed to the Prime Ministers of the Coal and Steel Community countries a few days ago, much to the chagrin of the Government in Paris: ‘Determined to do everything in my power to work for the creation of a European federation, towards which the European Coal and Steel Community is but the first step, I came to the conclusion in November of last year by the lack of any progress whatsoever in this direction that I would serve this cause more effectively if I regained my freedom to act as I saw fit ...’ Paris may well have been no less irritated to discover that, on the very eve of the conference in Sicily, Bonn had seen the need to rally to the support of Jean Monnet, who, in accordance with the wishes of influential circles in France, was to be replaced by a less passionate integrationist.

Meanwhile, the Assembly and High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community have been trying to regroup for a vigorous counter-attack to avert the impending crisis. The ECSC Assembly expects an increase in its own powers and those of the High Authority and has urged the Ministers to initiate the creation of further supranational bodies modelled on the Coal and Steel Community. Lastly, in the aforementioned letter, Monnet expressed his willingness to continue in office ‘in view of the fresh impetus that has been injected into the European policies of the Governments.’

Whatever the result of the election for the future President, it will not alter the general political situation that confronts the ECSC. The very diverse views of the national governments as to where the Community should go from here stand in opposition to each other in Messina. Significantly, it is the Netherlands Foreign Minister, Johan Beyen, who has made himself the talk of Messina with the boldest integration plans. But the first news to come out of Sicily is that the plans for a Western European transport community and for an atomic pool have been shelved for the time being. The conspicuous feature of the position of the Federal Government is that it seeks to achieve ‘integration’ — apparently we cannot find an alternative to that infelicitous word — primarily by resolving the monetary problem and by dismantling trade barriers.

It would be gratifying if this line, in which the hand of Ludwig Erhard is recognisable, meant abandoning any more supranational experiments for the moment in order to solve the crucial problem, namely the convertibility of our currencies. The advantage of adopting a policy of liberalisation rather than creating new supranational planning centres would be twofold: on the one hand, it would facilitate the achievement of the aim of a common market for all goods and services, while, on the other hand, a departure from the ideal of supranationalism in the present climate would make it easier to forge a link between the United Kingdom and the Western European economic community. It is common knowledge that Britain’s agreement with the European Coal and Steel Community is a rather loose arrangement which requires the British side merely to exchange information and to consult the ECSC.

As long as the French do not yet possess enough self-assurance to feel entirely comfortable in a closer European union, the United Kingdom will continue to be a key factor in any attempt to unify Europe. Following the signature of the Paris Agreements, London’s decision to keep some divisions permanently deployed on the continent was hailed as a radical innovation. This break with British tradition cannot, of course, obscure the fact that the purpose of these divisions is not so much to promote European unification

as to secure the vital front line of Britain's strategic defences. The great fact of life in London — and not only there — is not Europe but the Atlantic defence system, to which the British are inclined to subordinate not only the question of German reunification but also the aim of an independent union of European nations.

The architects of the European Coal and Steel Community were always well aware that the economic merger of individual industries is not a sustainable aim in itself in the longer term but can only serve as the basis for more economic, military and political integration. Economic unification should be followed by military unification and military by political unification of the Six, culminating in direct European elections. The scuppering of the plans for a European Defence Community brought this development to a halt; the elaborate constitution project, to which our future Foreign Minister, Heinrich von Brentano, had dedicated himself so tirelessly, was left high and dry. The efforts to resuscitate the Western European Union cannot obscure the fact that the Paris Agreements have committed us to the North Atlantic defence structure. It was primarily this choice of course, rather than the upsurge of interest in German unity that is often cited by those beyond our borders, which provoked the great anti-climax, curbing the emotional groundswell in favour of integration. Now many people imagine that our desire for reunification and our commitment to Europe are hopelessly contradictory attitudes, that in every country, and especially in West Germany, European thinking has given way to national thinking. If the Germans' unbridled enthusiasm for Europe aroused suspicion five years ago, the cooling of that ardour is now greeted with the same suspicion.

It would be best not to overestimate either the level of zeal or the degree of disillusionment. The realisation that Europe has no future as a society of old-style nation states, leading its own separate life between the two power blocs, has taken such deep root among most Germans in the light of their experiences in recent decades that it cannot simply evaporate overnight. We must appreciate, of course, that there is little point in taking the very highly organised NATO model, which is already 'supranational' in many respects, imbuing it with European sentiment and thereby raising false hopes. It would be even more dangerous in the long term if our neighbours were to underestimate the grim severity of the tragic division of Germany, the cruel irony that, at the very moment in history when the Germans start to think in an unreservedly European manner like scarcely any other nation, a national reunification problem should be visited upon them, a problem which, as long as it remains unresolved, will block the path to a United States of Europe.