

Conference on the establishment of a Council of Europe: extract concerning the organisation's seat (London, 3 May 1949)

Caption: Extract from the minutes of the Conference on the establishment of a Council of Europe, held at St James's Palace in London from 3 to 5 May 1949, concerning the issue of the organisation's seat.

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Conference on the establishment of a Council of Europe (London, 3-5 May 1949)

Minutes of the Conference held at St. James's Palace, beginning at 10:30 a.m. on Tuesday, 3rd May

[...]

15. Article 11

M. Rasmussen (Denmark) said that, while being by no means an adversary of France, he would prefer the seat of the Council to be in a small centrally placed European country, for instance in the Netherlands or in Belgium with their long unbroken traditions of international co-operation and of law and justice. If, however, the general opinion was that the seat should lie in France, he would prefer the neighbourhood of Paris. He asked whether the facilities for travelling and communications, as well as for the material establishment of the Council, were sufficiently good in Strasbourg. He also pointed out that the climate was hot and close in late summer.

M. Schuman (France) reminded the Conference that it was not he but the Chairman who had spontaneously suggested Strasbourg. The suggestion once made, however, the French Government were grateful and it was up to them to defend it. He could reassure his Danish colleague about the efficiency of the communications and buildings for the Council, recalling that for half a century Strasbourg had been the seat of a provincial parliament. He considered, moreover, that the choice of Strasbourg had a particular symbolic significance. For long years the possession of Strasbourg had been a matter of strife between the European countries; he thought that if they were to choose Strasbourg now, they would already be making a beginning in removing such strife and would be pursuing the aim of closer unity which was set out in Chapter I of the Statute.

M. Bevin (United Kingdom) agreed on the importance of Strasbourg as symbolising the end of the age-long feuds and fears in Europe. He felt that if the seat of the Council were to be in one of the existing capital cities, it would fail to strike the popular imagination.

M. Rasmussen (Denmark) thanked the French and United Kingdom Delegates for this explanation; as for the symbolic importance of Strasbourg, he could only say that he hoped that they were right. He understood that the general feeling of the Conference was in favour of Strasbourg, and he therefore did not propose to insist on his suggestion.

Signor Sforza (Italy) said he was the most grateful to the United Kingdom Delegation for having suggested Strasbourg. He agreed on its symbolic importance: what had been a centre of disunity in the past, would, he hoped, become the centre of union for the future.

M. Unden (Sweden) said that, while understanding the sentimental and symbolic reasons for choosing Strasbourg, he shared the misgivings of the Danish Foreign Minister on practical grounds. Nevertheless, he likewise would not press these objections.

It was agreed to adopt Article 11.

[...]