

'Miscarriage at Messina' from The New Statesman and Nation (11 June 1955)

Caption: On 11 June 1955, the London weekly political magazine The New Statesman and Nation comments ironically on the outcome of the Messina Conference on the revival of European integration.

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Miscarriage at Messina

Our Paris Correspondent writes: In an age of "Neutral Zones," there is less and less place for "Little Europe." Last week's Messina Conference, which united the six Foreign Ministers of the Schuman Plan countries, was planned to celebrate its re-birth; in fact, it ended in a disastrous miscarriage. To begin with, the mid-wives arrived in a quarrelsome mood. M. Pinay had antagonised Professor Hallstein by withdrawing, at the last moment, his support for M. Monnet's reappointment as chairman of the coal-steel pool, and allowing M. René Mayer to win the day. He had also annoyed M. Spaak by failing to secure the nomination of M. Hervé Alphand as M. François-Poncet's successor at Bonn (M. Alphand, on M. Faure's insistence, was unceremoniously bundled off to New York as France's U.N. representative). All were furious with M. Martino for obliging them to travel all the way to Sicily (because of his election engagements) and for their accommodation arrangements, which obliged them to make two 50-mile car journeys every day. Apart from these preliminary difficulties, the Conference took place in the conspiratorial atmosphere which seems inseparable from meetings of "European" leaders: abrupt, unexplained recesses, mysterious long-distance telephone calls and deliberately ambiguous communiqués. At one point, the Ministers even cleared their private secretaries out of the room in order to conduct their discussions in greater freedom, though this did not, of course, prevent the usual inspired "leaks."

What emerged from all this? Remarkably little. The purpose of the Conference was the much-discussed *relance européenne*, designed to compensate for the "temporary check" of E.D.C. The agenda was a Benelux note proposing the extension of the common market to cover energy (gas, electricity, atomic power) and communications (canals, autoroutes, electrical and air transport), and its authors apparently hoped that some sort of preliminary protocol would be signed at the Conference. An Italian note, delivered during the Conference, gave this some support; but it soon became clear that Germany and France were determined to restrain Benelux enthusiasm. M. Pinay's reluctance surprised nobody, since he was known to be tied down by Cabinet instructions; but Professor Hallstein made it clear that he was not interested in any projects which conflicted with his Government's view of what a "liberal national economy" should be, and secondly that Germany would support further steps towards a supra-national community only when, and if, prior and definitive French agreement had been secured.

French observers interpreted this as a sign that the sovereign, rearmed Germany of 1955 has already largely discarded the "European" idealism which its humbler predecessor found it so profitable to adopt, and his words encouraged the belief that the defeat of E.D.C. and the passing of the Paris Agreements will eventually prove fatal to "Little Europe." In these circumstances, the best the Conference could do was to hand over the Benelux proposals to a committee, instruct it to report back in October, express a hope that Britain would take part in its deliberations, disagree as to who was to be its chairman and fill out the rest of the communiqué with a list of pious, but vague, objectives. Meanwhile, in Paris, M. Guy Mollet, another "European," produced an appropriate echo to this Utopian note by calling for the establishment of Esperanto as a World Language.