

## The Messina Conference

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On 10 November 1954, Jean Monnet, President of the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), seeking to recover his freedom of action, informed the governments of the six Member States of his decision not to request a renewal of his term. In any case, the Foreign Ministers of the Six had to meet in order to nominate a member of the High Authority and to appoint its new President and Vice-Presidents for the period expiring on 10 February 1957. At the request of Gaetano Martino, the Italian Foreign Minister, who was detained in Sicily because of the Regional Assembly elections, that meeting was held in Messina (and partially in Taormina) on 1, 2 and 3 June 1955. It was in fact the first meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Six since the failure, in August 1954, to ratify the European Defence Community (EDC). The Conference, chaired by Joseph Bech, President of the Luxembourg Government and Minister for Foreign Affairs, was attended by Antoine Pinay, French Minister for Foreign Affairs, Gaetano Martino, Walter Hallstein, German Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Paul-Henri Spaak, Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Johan Willem Beyen, Netherlands Minister for Foreign Affairs. Apart from the above item, the agenda included consideration of the action programme to be pursued in order to develop European integration.

Indeed, the Messina Conference was to signal the relaunch of Europe. The mood was relaxed, especially since Franco-German negotiations regarding the Sarre had recently produced an outcome that all parties considered satisfactory. Despite the about-turn of Monnet who, on 21 May 1955, put himself forward after all as a candidate for his own succession, the Six agreed without further ado to appoint René Mayer, former President of the French Council of Ministers and a fervent 'European', as President of the High Authority. They also reappointed the Belgian, Albert Coppé, and the German, Franz Etzel, as Vice-Presidents of the College. The six ministers then devoted much of their time to considering the German and Italian memoranda and, above all, the memorandum the three Benelux countries had jointly adopted on 18 May and had forwarded to the other three governments two days later. In practice, the Six were not choosing between the pursuit of sectoral integration and the step-by-step establishment of a general common market. In fact, they instructed an Intergovernmental Committee to look into both those options. Antoine Pinay, who had strong reservations about a general common market and its potential institutions, also managed to ensure that the Committee be set up not for the purpose of drafting treaties but merely to consider what would be technically feasible. The Benelux ministers immediately proposed that the Committee of government delegates and experts be chaired by a political personality who would be responsible for coordinating the various activities. Given that their counterparts had hitherto shown little interest in procedural questions, that proposal was readily accepted. The name of Paul van Zeeland, former Belgian Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, was mentioned. On 18 June, however, on a proposal put forward via diplomatic channels by Johan Willem Beyen, Paul-Henri Spaak was appointed by his peers as Chairman of the Intergovernmental Committee created by the Messina Conference.

In fact, there were rather differing and conflicting concepts of Europe at Messina: for or against supranational institutions, for or against giving the ECSC wider powers, for or against vertical or horizontal integration, giving priority to political or economic aspects, and so forth. Despite those differences, agreement was reached at dawn on 3 June. The lengthy final resolution, which largely reflects the point of view of Benelux, formed a sufficiently coherent whole to provide a solid basis for further work. In their preliminary statement, the ministers in fact adopted important positions of principle that gave direction to the debates from the outset by defining a specific scope and a fixed objective. Determined to ensure that Europe maintained its position in the world and to restore its influence, they also set themselves the objective of progressively raising the standard of living of its population. In the final communiqué of the Conference, the Six stated that the moment had come 'to go a step further towards the construction of Europe [...] first of all [...] in the economic field' and that 'the further progress must be towards the setting up of a united Europe by the development of common institutions, the gradual merging of national economies, the creation of a common market and the harmonisation of their social policies'. They also agreed that the aim of their work in the field of economic policy was to set up a common European market, free from all customs duties and all quantitative restrictions.

That market must, however, be established in stages, and its introduction necessitated a study of the

following questions:

- ‘- procedure and rhythm required for the gradual elimination of impediments to trade between the participating countries, as well as appropriate measures for the gradual unification of customs systems in regard to third countries;
- steps to be taken for the harmonisation of the general policy of the participating countries in the financial, economic and social fields;
- adoption of methods which will ensure a degree of coordination between the monetary policies of the member states which will enable the creation and development of a common market;
- a system of saving clauses;
- establishment and operation of a readaptation fund;
- gradual introduction of freedom of movement for workers;
- setting up of rules ensuring the full play of competition in the common market, in such a way as to exclude in particular all forms of national discrimination;
- the appropriate institutional means for the realisation and operation of the common market.’

Moreover, that market was not conceived solely as an economic area within which products could move freely. Indeed it went further than the Manchester School’s theory of automatic adjustment, according to which a common market is defined simply by the elimination of public or private obstacles to the internal movement of goods, men, services and capital. For that concept presupposed applying the theory of comparative costs and a difference of level between states. That was what the French delegation, in particular, feared and it was in any case a risk given the growing state intervention in the organisation of the economy. The harmonisation of economic and social policies also appeared to be a second, concomitant component of the concept of a common market as defined in the Messina Resolution.

In the face of the debates on overall or sectoral integration processes, in Messina the Foreign Ministers expressed their wish to start negotiations at both levels at once: while forms of new, partial integration, especially in regard to transport, conventional energy and nuclear energy, needed to be studied, another objective was the creation of a common market. This two-pronged approach certainly had some real disadvantages, since it might lead to some confusion of activities. Aside from the fact that it was based on a compromise, however, the method adopted by the Six did allow simultaneous progress to be made in both directions, thanks to the fact that the Spaak Committee then took care to separate those activities by assigning them to two different committees.

In regard to conventional energy, the Messina Resolution provided for more and cheaper energy to be placed at the disposal of the European economies, in particular by developing the exchange of gas and electric current, in order to increase the profitability of investment and reduce the cost of supplies. The broad lines of an overall energy production and consumption policy were then to be adopted. Unlike the resolution adopted by the Special Council of Ministers of the ECSC on 12 and 13 October 1953, which even then referred to joint studies of economic development, the coordination of investment and the economic situation, the Messina Resolution provided, implicitly at least, for the creation of a common coordinating body and, at most, the inclusion of conventional energy among the areas falling within the terms of reference of the ECSC.

That was not all, however, for the Messina Resolution also tackled the delicate area of nuclear energy. In effect, the six Ministers recognised that the development of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes would open up prospects of a new industrial revolution. They also considered it essential to consider creating a common organisation, which would have the responsibility and the facilities for ensuring the peaceful development of nuclear energy. In particular, that meant setting up a common fund — financed by contributions from each of the participating countries — to enable the financing of plants and of research in progress or still to be undertaken; free and sufficient access to raw materials, and free exchange of knowledge and technicians, by-products and specialised equipment; making the findings available and granting financial aid for their utilisation. Given that the nuclear energy sector was still fairly free from private interests and given the potential military issues involved, the authors of the Messina Resolution considered that it would be appropriate to move towards setting up a European body with exclusive

responsibility for nuclear issues and with major powers of control.

In regard to transport, the Six were in favour of the common development of large-scale communication facilities with a view to the expansion of trade and the movement of persons. They referred in particular to the establishment of a network of canals, motor highways and railway lines, and to coordination of air transport. The Messina Resolution provided for introducing safeguard clauses and creating two funds: a readaptation fund to provide aid for economic players affected by the establishment of the common market, and an investment fund to be used for the common development of Europe's economic potentialities and, in particular, for the development of the less favoured regions of the participating countries.

One paragraph of the Messina Resolution deals with social issues. The Six agreed on the need to study the progressive harmonisation of national regulations in force, especially those relating to working hours, overtime pay, length of holidays and holiday pay.

Regarding the procedure to be adopted in order to achieve those various objectives, the Six provided that the Technical Committee would present regular interim reports on its activities to the six Foreign Ministers and must submit a general report to them not later than 1 October 1955. In its collective activities it would call on the ECSC High Authority and the Secretariats-General of the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC), the Council of Europe and the European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT) for any cooperation it required. Given their wish for the British to take part in the ongoing efforts to achieve European unity, the six Ministers also provided that the United Kingdom, as a state belonging to Western European Union (WEU) and an associate state, since December 1954, of the ECSC, would be invited to participate in that work.