

The Intergovernmental Committee created by the Messina Conference

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The Intergovernmental Committee created by the Messina Conference

Placed under the chairmanship of Paul-Henri Spaak, the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Intergovernmental Committee created by the Messina Conference held its constituent meeting on 9 July 1955 at the offices of the Belgian Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Brussels. Subsequent meetings took place in the premises of the Trieste company in the Rue Belliard. The heads of the six delegations were Carl Friedrich Ophüls, Minister Plenipotentiary (Federal Republic of Germany), Baron Jean-Charles Snoy et d'Oppuers, Secretary-General of the Ministry for Economic Affairs (Belgium), Félix Gaillard, Member of the National Assembly and former government minister (France), Lodovico Benvenuti, former Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (Italy), Lambert Schaus, Luxembourg's ambassador in Brussels (Grand Duchy of Luxembourg), and Professor Gerard Marius Verrijn Stuart of the University of Amsterdam (Netherlands). At the insistence of Johan Willem Beyen, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, a permanent representative of the British Government was also invited to attend all the meetings of the Spaak Committee. Accordingly, the United Kingdom appointed Russell F. Bretherton, Under-Secretary at the Board of Trade, to represent it in Brussels.

A steering committee comprising the heads of the national delegations and chaired by Paul-Henri Spaak was immediately appointed for the purpose of initiating, directing, coordinating and regularly monitoring the work of the specialised committees, namely:

1. a committee on the common market, investments and social problems,
2. a committee on conventional energy sources,
3. a committee on nuclear energy, and
4. a committee on transport and public works.

In addition, a subcommittee on investments and a subcommittee on social problems operated within the framework of the committee on the common market, investments and social problems, while a subcommittee on air transport and a subcommittee on postal services and telecommunications were created within the framework of the committee on transport and public works.

The steering committee, which began meeting on 18 July 1955, undertook an examination of proposals presented by the national delegations for the implementation of the decisions taken at the Messina Conference, and drew up initial guidelines for each of the specialised committees.

It was on the basis of these guidelines that the committees and technical working parties began their work on 20 July. The experts, however, were instructed not to begin by examining institutional issues. As far as working methods were concerned, the steering committee decided that several of the committees should compile questionnaires designed to elicit specific information from the experts. There was a very intensive schedule of meetings, which were held every week from Tuesday morning until Friday evening. In accordance with the terms of the Messina resolution, the steering committee posited the common market as a working hypothesis to the committees, whose efforts were to revolve around that primary objective.

Although it participated in the initial preparatory work, the United Kingdom decided in October 1955 to drop out of the Spaak Committee, the success of which it regarded as a very remote possibility and indeed a fairly undesirable prospect. The British, in fact, opposed the idea of a European customs union, because they wished to preserve the autonomy of their customs and excise system, to protect their industries and to maintain their preferential links with their Commonwealth partners. Besides, since Britain had possessed the atomic bomb since 1952 and was already financing nuclear-research programmes with the United States and Canada, it had no wish to compromise that fruitful collaboration by associating itself with Euratom.

As far as participation in the work of international organisations was concerned, the Spaak Committee decided that the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) should have a permanent seat on the steering committee in a consultative capacity, while the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), the Council of Europe and the European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT) were invited to attend meetings only in cases where the chairman considered that their

presence would be useful.

Once the committee had concluded its deliberations, a working party began to draft the final report in February 1956. This group comprised Pierre Uri, head of the Economics Division of the High Authority of the CSCE, Hans von der Groeben, head of directorate at the German Ministry of Economics, and the Belgian diplomat Albert Hupperts. The three withdrew to Cap-Ferrat, in the south of France, to prepare what was to become the *Report by the Heads of Delegations to the Foreign Ministers*. At this stage, the Spaak Report was not binding on governments. Once it was completed and delivered on 21 April, however, the document served as the negotiating basis for the Conference of Foreign Ministers of the Six in Venice on 29 and 30 May 1956.