

The Intergovernmental Conference on the Common Market and Euratom

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The Spaak Report, which was essentially a technical study, had been accepted at the Venice conference of 29 and 30 May 1956 as the basis for further negotiations on European integration. The Heads of Delegation of the Six met at the Belgian Foreign Ministry in Brussels on 26 June to determine the rules of procedure for the Intergovernmental Conference on the Common Market and Euratom. In accordance with the decisions taken in Venice, the Intergovernmental Conference, chaired by Belgian Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak, comprised two groups responsible for examining the technical issues involved in drafting each of the treaties:

- the Common Market group, chaired by Hans von der Groeben, head of department in the German Ministry for Economic Affairs;
- the Euratom group, chaired by Pierre Guillaumat, general administrator of France's Atomic Energy Commission (CEA).

A drafting group chaired by Roberto Ducci, Deputy Director-General for Economic Affairs in the Italian Foreign Ministry, was also set up and placed at the disposal of the Heads of Delegation. Its tasks were to frame the conclusions of the Spaak Report in the form of articles that could serve as the basis of a first version of the treaties, and to draft the legal provisions of the final texts submitted for approval to the Heads of Delegation and group chairmen.

Like the Spaak Committee, the Intergovernmental Conference was made up of national delegations. The delegations were larger, however, and included experts from the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Many officials from national administrations also took part in the technical discussions, as did representatives of trade union organisations and employers' associations.

The proceedings were directed by the Committee of Heads of Delegation, which had overall political responsibility. The work of the two technical groups, as well as all contentious issues, were referred to it. The Committee of Heads of Delegation was chaired by Paul-Henri Spaak and consisted of Baron Snoy et d'Oppuers (Belgium), Carl Friedrich Ophüls (Federal Republic of Germany), Maurice Faure (France), Lodovico Benvenuti (Italy), Lambert Schaus (Luxembourg) and Johannes Linthorst Homan (Netherlands). The Common Market and Euratom working groups examined the recommendations contained in the report of the Intergovernmental Committee set up by the Messina conference with a view to drafting the treaties. At the request of the French delegation, discussions on the inclusion of the overseas countries and territories (OCT) in the Common Market were postponed to the Conference's second session in September.

The first session lasted till 21 July, and the negotiations were suspended during August. They got off to a difficult start. On 6 July a debate on the Common Market and Euratom had begun in the French National Assembly, and it became apparent that the Assembly was dominated by concern for the problems of Algeria and did not have the necessary majority in favour of the French Government's European stance. There was also some uncertainty about the working methods of the Conference, with some members of the Assembly calling into question matters that had already been settled in the Spaak Report and others proposing the creation of a multitude of subgroups on more or less academic issues.

The Conference resumed at the castle of Val Duchesse near Brussels after the summer break. It proceeded more efficiently, as the position of each party was taking shape. The French delegation made it clear that certain prior social measures were politically indispensable and that the institutions established had to be distinct from those of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Almost immediately, it added a demand for an exceptional customs regime for a fixed period, invoking the situation in North Africa, inflationary pressures, and the need to maintain export aids and compensatory import duties.

While work in the Euratom group was proceeding at a satisfactory pace and solutions were gradually found on all the sticking points, such as purchasing priority and monitoring, the Common Market group remained in difficulty. All the negotiators' political will, Paul-Henri Spaak's diplomatic skills, and prompting by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, were needed in order to make progress in the final Val Duchesse negotiations

in the winter of 1956 to 1957.