

The Brussels Conference

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After the Noordwijk conference on 6 September 1955, the work of the Spaak Committee proceeded apace, and the various working groups and subcommittees submitted their reports in mid-October. At that point the Heads of Delegation of the Six agreed it was up to them to attend to the drafting of the report envisaged in the Messina Resolution. They mandated the Belgian Foreign Minister, Paul-Henri Spaak, to draw up preparatory documents for that purpose.

The Foreign Ministers of the Six met in Brussels on 11 and 12 February 1956 with Spaak in the chair and took note of the general results of the work carried out by the Heads of Delegation. Spaak's presentation covered both the work done on general economic integration and that on economic integration in the transport and energy sectors. The Six took stock of the work done so far and approved its general direction.

On the question of whether the common market should be conceived as a free-trade area or a customs union, Spaak stressed that the experts were unanimously in favour of a customs union, which they thought would be a more effective solution, and that the six delegations had agreed it would have to be achieved gradually over ten to twelve years. In this connection, Spaak argued that the task of monitoring the gradual implementation of the machinery laid down in the future treaty would have to be entrusted to a Community parliamentary body.

Turning to the institutional aspects, Spaak explained that their importance would depend on how flexible the treaty was. It would also be necessary to adopt the approach suggested by the Council of Europe, i.e. to create an institution with limited terms of reference but real powers. In his view, four institutions were needed: a Council of Ministers, a body corresponding more or less to the High Authority in the system adopted by the European Coal and Steel Community, an Assembly and a Court of Justice. Spaak thought the Council should take its decisions unanimously wherever possible, although a system could be envisaged that would evolve over time, such that the Council's decision-making procedure was more rigorous at the outset than in later phases of the establishment of the common market.

Given that the steering group had not yet completed its work on issues concerning agriculture, trade distortions and the arrangements applicable to overseas territories, Spaak avoided any mention of them. Besides, the Ministers were not being asked to make decisions at this stage: they noted with satisfaction the progress made, and decided to hold their next meeting immediately after submission of the overall report, which was subsequently scheduled for 15 March 1956.