

The Paris Conference (20 and 21 October 1956)

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/the_paris_conference_20_and_21_october_1956-en-98a1c610-0a97-4a7b-8c1e-4fe78e40873b.html

Last updated: 08/07/2016



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Meeting at the request of the Heads of Delegation, the Conference held in Paris on 20 and 21 October 1956 under the chairmanship of Joseph Bech, Luxembourg Minister for Foreign Affairs, failed to achieve many tangible results. At that meeting, Paul-Henri Spaak, the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the Intergovernmental Conference on the Common Market and Euratom, submitted to his counterparts an interim progress report on the discussions being held at the Château de Val Duchesse.

During the meeting, the Foreign Ministers of the six European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) Member States considered how to move on from the first to the second stage of the Common Market and to ensure its decisive progress. Whereas, before the Venice Conference, held on 29 and 30 May 1956, France had envisaged only experimental participation in the Common Market, it then made the transition from the first to the second stage conditional on the prior attainment of a number of objectives. At Val Duchesse, however, its European partners managed to persuade the French Delegation to reduce this demand to the drawing up of a procedure for ascertaining that the objectives were achieved.

At the Paris Conference, France openly waived the idea of a right of secession from the future Community, but it adopted an even firmer position on the prerequisites in the social sector. Although it accepted that no major problem was raised by the system of paid holidays, it demanded that each State adopt the measures required for the application of the principle of equal pay for men and women. The agreement of the Six could not, however, be immediately secured on the third social prerequisite: payment for overtime.