

Parliamentary debates and ratification of the Treaties

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Parliamentary debates and ratification of the Treaties

When the French National Assembly rejected the European Defence Community (EDC) on 30 August 1954 and plans for the European Political Community (EPC) were automatically abandoned, there were considerable fears that the French Parliament would once again hold back Europe's revival, particularly as the preliminary debates held in the National Assembly on the future Euratom Treaty (from 6 to 11 July 1956) and the Common Market Treaty (from 15 to 22 January 1957) clearly showed where the reservations and priorities of a large section of the political community and the general public in France lay. The procedures for ratifying the Treaties took from May to December 1957.

With regard to the campaign for the ratification of the Treaties establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom), both signed in Rome on 25 March 1957, the Bundesrat in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) carried out an initial examination of the bill authorising the ratification of the Treaties establishing the EEC and the EAEC on 3 May. On the same day, the Bundesrat unanimously adopted a resolution according to which it approved the two Treaties but expressed various criticisms. The ratification bill was debated and unanimously adopted in plenary sitting on 19 July.

On 5 July, the text was tabled before the Bundestag for a vote at second and third reading. On 25 June, the Social Democrats had decided, after lengthy discussions, to vote in favour of the bill, thereby ensuring its adoption by a large majority. The second reading was a mere formality, completed in a matter of minutes. The debate at third reading did not throw up any surprises or new elements. The vote was conducted by show of hands. Only the Free Democrats and the All-German Bloc voted against. MPs were aware that the FRG was gaining access to new markets that were vital for the reconstruction of its economy.

In France, the French Union Assembly approved the Treaties by 100 votes to 43 on 25 June 1957, and the National Assembly then scrutinised the Treaties on 2–6 and 9 July. The debates essentially focused on two issues: how would the French economy adapt to the new competition created by the Common Market, and were the guarantees previously demanded by MPs actually enshrined in the Treaties? To everyone's surprise, however, the tone of the discussions was relatively apathetic, and, on 9 July, the National Assembly ratified the EEC Treaty by 342 votes to 234 and the Euratom Treaty by 332 votes to 240. On 24 July, the Council of the Republic adopted both Treaties by 219 votes to 68. The results showed just how far public opinion had shifted since the National Assembly's rejection, three years earlier, of the Treaty establishing the European Defence Community (EDC). It must be said that, in the intervening period, the economic and political situation in the Fourth Republic had deteriorated, and the new Treaties brought major benefits for France both in terms of foreign policy and in the economic, trade and energy fields. The French MPs' approval undoubtedly opened a decisive breach in subsequent ratification debates.

On 23 July, the Council of the French Republic finally approved the draft law by 219 votes to 68, paving the way for the Treaties to be ratified in the other national parliaments. The Italian Chamber of Deputies discussed the issue in the second half of July and wound up the debate on 30 July, approving the ratification by 311 votes to 144 with 54 abstentions. Only the Communists voted unanimously against. On 9 October, it was the Italian Senate's turn to ratify the Treaties. The Italian MPs' main priority was the scale of the economic benefits that accession to the Common Market would bring for the country. Politicians particularly welcomed the capital that would be allocated to the underdeveloped regions in the south of Italy and the opening up of new markets for the country's agricultural products.

In the three Benelux countries, the Treaties received massive parliamentary support, as everyone expected. The Second Chamber of the States-General in the Netherlands discussed the Treaties from 1 to 4 October. Despite criticisms that the Communities were not sufficiently supranational in nature, it adopted the draft laws on the EEC and Euratom on 4 October by 115 votes to 12. The only votes against were cast by the Communists and some religious parties. The First Chamber of the States-General discussed the Treaties on 3 and 4 December and approved the EEC Treaty by 46 votes to 5, while it adopted the Euratom Treaty without putting it to the vote.

The Belgian Parliament, after extensively protracted discussions on the Treaties, actually ratified them in just a few days. On 19 November, the Chamber of Deputies adopted the draft laws ratifying the EEC and Euratom Treaties by 174 votes to 4 with 2 abstentions. The Social Christian and Socialist parties block-voted in favour. On 28 November, the Senate in turn ratified the Rome Treaties by 134 votes to 2 with 2 abstentions.

During this same period, the Luxembourg Chamber of Deputies discussed the Treaties on 19, 20 and 26 November. On 26 November, the Treaties were approved, along with the Convention on Certain Institutions Common to the European Communities, by 46 votes (Christian Social, Socialist and Liberal MPs) to 3 (Communists).

The instruments of ratification of the Treaties establishing the EEC and Euratom and related documents were deposited in Rome between 23 November and 13 December 1957. The Treaties establishing the EEC and the EAEC were then able to come into force on 1 January 1958.