

From the Messina Conference to the Rome Treaties (EEC and EAEC) — Full text

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Last updated: 04/08/2016



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Introduction

On 25 March 1957, the Treaties establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom) were signed in Rome. This event marked a key stage in the history of European integration. Less than five years after the entry into force of the Paris Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), and less than three years after the failure of the planned European Defence Community (EDC), united Europe took an irreversible step forward towards integration, particularly since, unlike the Treaty establishing the ECSC (signed for 50 years), the Rome Treaties made no provision for a time limit or a withdrawal procedure.

The Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) created a general common market characterised by a customs union which was based both on the free movement of goods, persons, services and capital and on the drawing up of common policies, in particular in the sectors of agriculture and transport. Euratom, which enshrined the civil importance of atomic energy, created a common nuclear market.

I. Towards European revival

A. The failure of the EDC

In the summer of 1950, spurred on by the outbreak of the Korean War in June which had made the communist threat a reality, Jean Monnet, General Commissioner of the French National Planning Board and the man behind the Schuman Plan, sought to organise European defence on a supranational basis comparable to that laid down in the Schuman proposal. At the same time, the USA asked their allies to plan for the rearmament of West Germany. Jean Monnet put his proposal to René Plevin, French Premier and former Defence Minister, who in turn submitted it to the French National Assembly on 24 October 1950.

The plan proposed the creation of a European army, with the eventual involvement of German units, to be placed under a single military and political European authority. This proposal sparked fierce debate in France. Although it was accepted by most Western countries, the plan for a European Defence Community (EDC) was rejected by the French National Assembly in August 1954. The refusal of the French National Assembly to ratify the Treaty establishing the EDC automatically led to the plan for a European Political Community, of which it was the institutional corollary, being abandoned.

France's course of action met with considerable consternation in Western Europe and the United States. France, which had for many years been the champion of the European cause, found itself seriously discredited by its refusal to ratify the EDC Treaty. There was intense disappointment, and a rapid response was required.

B. Plans for revival

From the autumn of 1954, following the rejection of the European Defence Community (EDC) by the French Parliament, some Benelux leaders set about reviving a Community plan that provided solutions to the specific problems of economic integration. Still shocked by the

failure of the EDC, they refused to let European unification get bogged down.

As early as 5 May 1953, Johan Willem Beyen, Dutch Foreign Minister, had sent a letter to his counterparts in the Member States of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in which he set out a framework for the establishment of general economic integration, rather than sector-based integration, with the aim of progressively developing a true common market in Europe.

Various independent experts, international bodies and pro-European movements came forward with proposals for reviving sectoral integration by pooling the energy and transport sectors. However, numerous technical and economic problems arose before it became possible to bring these plans to fruition.

In early 1955, the French Government was considered at the very least to be discredited by the failure of the European Defence Community (EDC), so Jean Monnet avoided informing it of his plan for a European Atomic Energy Community. He contacted Belgian Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak with a view to coordinating plans for a revival of the European project, suggesting that he shoulder political responsibility for the initiative. The Netherlands Foreign Minister, Johan Willem Beyen, and his Luxembourg counterpart, Joseph Bech, were immediately in favour of the plan presented to them by Spaak.

On 18 May 1955, the three Benelux countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg) adopted a joint memorandum, which they sent to the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), France and Italy two days later. This memorandum set out a plan for reviving European integration by extending the responsibilities of the ECSC in the areas of transport, energy and nuclear energy, and in the economic, social and financial fields. It was examined and discussed on 1, 2 and 3 July 1955 at the conference of Foreign Ministers of the six ECSC countries held in Messina.

It was at this conference that the European integration process was brought firmly back on course.

C. The Messina Conference

The Messina Conference, attended by the Foreign Ministers of the six Member States of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), took place from 1 to 3 June 1955. The Luxembourgish Joseph Bech chaired the meeting, which was attended by Antoine Pinay for France, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Professor Walter Hallstein for the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), Paul-Henri Spaak for Belgium and Johan Willem Beyen for the Netherlands.

In Messina the Foreign Ministers expressed their wish to start negotiations at both levels at once: while forms of new, partial integration — especially in the areas of transport, conventional energy and nuclear energy — needed to be examined, another objective was the creation of a common market.

The discussions mainly focused on the memorandum submitted by the Benelux countries, which summarised the various proposals and ideas. The ministers of the Six agreed to look into the possibility of extending European integration to all sectors of the economy.

There were rather differing and conflicting concepts of Europe at Messina: for or against supranational institutions, for or against giving the ECSC wider powers, giving priority to political or economic aspects, and so forth. Despite these differences, agreement was reached at dawn on 3 June 1955.

The Six adopted a resolution in which they stated their determination to make ‘further progress [...] towards the setting up of a united Europe by the development of common institutions, the gradual merging of national economies, the creation of a common market and the harmonisation of their social policies’.

Determined to ensure that Europe maintained its position in the world and to restore its influence, they also set themselves the objective of progressively raising the standard of living of its population.

The six ministers recognised the importance of developing nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. They therefore considered it essential to look into creating a common organisation which would have the responsibility and the facilities for ensuring the peaceful development of nuclear energy.

The Messina Conference signalled the start of the European revival.

D. The Spaak Report

The Intergovernmental Committee created by the Messina Conference, placed under the chairmanship of Belgian Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak, held its constituent meeting on 9 July 1955 at the offices of the Belgian Foreign Ministry in Brussels. This working party, composed of delegates from the six governments, was tasked with drawing up a report which would sketch the broad outline of a future European Economic Community (EEC) and European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC).

The Spaak Committee worked until 21 April 1956, aiming to answer the questions raised at the Messina Conference about the choice between a general common market and partial sectoral integration. It also identified ways of attaining the objectives set by the ministers. A steering committee comprising the heads of the national delegations and chaired by Paul-Henri Spaak was immediately appointed to organise, direct, coordinate and regularly monitor the work of the specialised committees. These committees examined the common market, investments and social issues; conventional energy; nuclear energy; and public transport and works. Various highly specialised subcommittees were subsequently set up to deal with the topics raised, which included customs and nuclear issues.

On 21 April 1956, the secretariat of the Intergovernmental Committee published the Spaak Report, which set out the broad lines of a future European Economic Community (EEC) and European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC). The report was divided into three parts: the first dealt with the common market, the second with Euratom, and the third with areas where the need for action was considered most urgent.

The solutions proposed in the Spaak Report constituted a specific action plan and served as a basis for the intergovernmental negotiations at Val Duchesse.

II. Negotiations on the Rome Treaties

A. The Val Duchesse negotiations

On 26 June 1956, the heads of delegation of the Six met at the Belgian Foreign Ministry in Brussels to determine the rules of procedure for the Intergovernmental Conference on the Common Market and Euratom. This conference was held over several sessions to lay the groundwork for the drafting of the Treaties establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom).

Belgian Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak was again appointed to chair the Intergovernmental Conference, which comprised two groups responsible for examining the technical issues involved in drafting each of the treaties, using the Spaak Report as a basis:

- the Common Market Group;
- the Euratom Group.

The Intergovernmental Conference was made up of national delegations from the Six. Experts from the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and several officials from national administrations also took part in the technical discussions, as did representatives of trade unions and employers' organisations.

While work in the Euratom Group proceeded at a satisfactory pace, the negotiations in the Common Market Group proved more difficult. Some members reopened questions that had already been resolved in the Spaak Report, while others suggested that a number of subgroups be set up to carry out various more or less academic tasks. The French and German delegations found it very hard to compromise on issues including the harmonisation of employment-related costs before the shift to phase two of the common market transition period; the establishment of the common external tariff (CET); how to link the overseas countries and territories (OCTs) to the EEC; competition rules; and the introduction of the institutional system.

It would require all the negotiators' political will, Paul-Henri Spaak's diplomatic skills, and prompting by the Foreign Ministers in order to make progress in the final negotiations held at Val Duchesse, near Brussels, in the winter of 1956 to 1957.

B. The international context: the Suez Crisis (1956) and the Hungarian Uprising (1956)

The international climate in the 1950s, over and above any immediate economic considerations, particularly highlighted the pressing need to revive the European integration process. The declaration on the nationalisation of the Suez Canal in July 1956 and Soviet intervention in Hungary in November 1956 were forceful reminders to the 'founding fathers' of Europe that the lone European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) did not carry much weight when faced with threats arising from international events. The intervention of Soviet troops in Budapest on 4 November 1956 served as a powerful demonstration of the ever-present Soviet threat and drove home the importance for the countries of Western Europe to

continue on the path of integration.

The Suez Crisis had also left its mark on the international community. The major world powers (the United States and the USSR) were highly critical of the action taken by France and the United Kingdom in the Suez Canal region. The USSR threatened Paris and London with nuclear reprisals while the United States, despite being a traditional ally of the European powers, complained that it had not been consulted beforehand. It did not appreciate this kind of neo-colonial gunboat diplomacy at all, and exerted enormous financial pressure on the United Kingdom through the United Nations. France was diplomatically humiliated and was powerless against the United States and the Soviet Union; once again, a united Europe appeared the best way for France to continue to play a major role on the international stage. German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer also refused to hide his disappointment at the US attitude.

But the diplomatic and military failure that resulted from the Suez Crisis also demonstrated the energy dependence of Western Europe and the need to retain access to foreign reserves of raw materials.

The only means of guaranteeing peace and prosperity seemed to be to build a stronger Europe.

C. The issues surrounding the establishment of a common market

The common market aimed to create in Europe a huge geographical area with a common economic policy, which, by merging national markets, could eliminate wastage of resources. The removal of obstacles to free competition and the promise of new sales outlets would enable production to be increased. Implementation of a general common market posed major challenges, however, for the economies of traditionally protectionist countries like France. Indeed, the customs union proposed by the six Member States of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) entailed the elimination of quotas and tariff barriers and the adoption of a common rate of customs duty.

There was wide disagreement about the procedures for implementing the common market. Germany and the three Benelux countries, whose economies depended heavily on exports, favoured economic liberalism and wanted a reduction in customs duties and a low common external tariff. France and Italy, whose economies appeared less competitive, were primarily in favour of mechanisms for market regulation and a certain amount of external protection. France, however, was also concerned about the future of its relations with its African colonies, and called for their inclusion in the future European common market.

The Six were unable to resolve the question of a possible common agricultural policy in a way which satisfied everybody; instead, they simply opted for a common European organisation of the markets once a transitional phase had expired. The treaty nonetheless provided for improvement in productivity, self-sufficiency in food for the Six and the fixing of an adequate income for farmers.

The trade unions in Europe played a particularly active role in the Val Duchesse negotiations. The future common market would have the task of harmonising social conditions and promoting workers' interests via full employment and workforce mobility. It should have the

effect of re-establishing or stimulating healthy competition within the European economy by encouraging a rational division of labour and creating the conditions essential to mass production. The trade unions also emphasised the importance of social harmonisation in the future EEC.

D. The issues surrounding the establishment of Euratom

In the mid-1950s, nuclear energy enjoyed widespread support. Many scientists and political leaders highlighted the new promise that peaceful use of the atom seemed to hold. Nuclear energy was seen as a key factor in strategic and economic terms, and was increasingly emerging as an alternative energy source for civilian use.

In November 1956, the heads of delegation of the Six attending the Intergovernmental Conference on the Common Market and Euratom instructed Louis Armand, the Chairman of French Railways (SNCF), Franz Etzel, Vice-President of the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), and Francesco Giordani, the former Chairman of the Italian National Committee for Nuclear Research (CNRN), representing France, Germany and Italy respectively, to draw up a report on how Europe might use nuclear energy to meet its growing energy requirements.

Only nuclear energy seemed able to meet the growing demand for electricity, which, according to the experts, would increase threefold between 1955 and 1975. It was imperative that Europe should encourage the production of large amounts of low-cost nuclear-powered electricity.

Euratom's missions were therefore to contribute to the rapid formation and development of Europe's nuclear industries, to help improve the standard of living in the Member States and to further the development of trade with other countries.

III. The signing of the Rome Treaties (25 March 1957)

A. The signing of the Rome Treaties

The Treaties establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC), negotiated in Val Duchesse in June 1956 at the Intergovernmental Conference on the Common Market and Euratom, were signed by representatives of the six Member States of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), namely the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, on 25 March 1957.

The signatories were:

- Paul-Henri Spaak, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Baron Jean-Charles Snoy et d'Oppuers, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Economic Affairs (Belgium);
- Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and Walter Hallstein, State Secretary in the Federal Foreign Office (FRG);
- Christian Pineau, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Maurice Faure, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs (France);

- Antonio Segni, President of the Council of Ministers, and Gaetano Martino, Minister for Foreign Affairs (Italy);
- Joseph Bech, President of the Government and Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Lambert Schaus, Ambassador to Brussels (Luxembourg);
- Joseph Luns, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Johannes Linthorst Homan, Head of the Dutch delegation to the Intergovernmental Conference on the Common Market and Euratom (Netherlands).

Wanting to commit themselves to an irreversible process, the Six did not provide for any specific duration or a procedure for withdrawal in the Treaties.

They were then debated and ratified by the national parliaments of the six signatory countries between May and December 1957. The Treaties entered into force on 1 January 1958.

The declarations and official speeches on 25 March 1957 bore witness to the joy and pride of the participants, to whom the Mayor of Rome presented, to mark the event, a gold medal depicting Romulus and Remus and the she-wolf.

B. The Treaty establishing the EEC

The Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (EEC), which was concluded for an unlimited period, comprises 248 articles plus 22 annexes. The Treaty is based on four broad principles: progressiveness, irreversibility, the prohibition of discrimination, and the open nature of the Community. It applies to the six Member States of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and it sets out the principles for the association of the overseas countries and territories (OCTs) and French overseas departments.

The EEC Treaty lays down the objective and the details of a customs union, provides for the drawing up of a common agricultural policy (CAP) and sets out rules for the free movement of persons, services and capital. In regard to the standardisation of competition, the EEC Treaty contains provisions on the rules applicable to undertakings and state aid. Finally, it outlines a common transport policy.

The Treaty provides for a legislative power (the Assembly), an executive power (the Council and the Commission) and a judicial power (the Court of Justice).

C. The EEC institutions

The EEC Treaty was founded on the traditional distinction between the three powers: a legislative power, an executive power and a judiciary. These were the Assembly, the Council and Commission, and the Court of Justice.

The Assembly was made up of representatives whom the six Member States of the Community appointed in their respective parliaments according to their own procedures. There were 36 for the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), France and Italy, 14 for Belgium and the Netherlands, and 6 for Luxembourg. The Assembly had deliberative and supervisory powers. It discussed the annual general report which the Commission submitted to it. It could censure the Commission by a majority of two-thirds of the votes cast and a simple majority of

members; the Commission was then forced to resign as a body. The Assembly could also deliberate on draft budgets submitted to it by the Council and propose amendments to them. It also issued opinions on some regulations when these were submitted to it by the Commission or the Council.

The Council, which was made up of government representatives, administered the Member States' common economic policy and had decision-making power in most cases. It decided either unanimously, by a qualified majority or by a simple majority. However, in most cases where a simple or qualified majority was required, a decision could be taken only on a proposal from the Commission, which in turn could be amended only by a unanimous decision of the Council. In the case of a qualified majority, the following weightings applied: the FRG, France and Italy 4 votes each; Belgium and the Netherlands 2 votes; Luxembourg 1 vote. When the decisions concerned were not on proposals from the Commission, the agreement of at least four countries was also required.

The Commission was a body of nine members with collective responsibility, appointed by the governments for a period of four years and selected for their ability and independence. A collegiate body in which decisions were taken by a simple majority, it presented proposals which the Council could amend only by a unanimous vote. It ensured that the provisions of the Treaty and the measures taken by the institutions pursuant to the Treaty were applied. It formulated recommendations or delivered opinions on matters dealt with in the Treaty if the Treaty expressly provided for this or if the Commission considered it necessary. The Commission had its own decision-making power and participated in shaping measures taken by the Council and the Common Assembly. Finally, it exercised the powers conferred on it by the Council for the implementation of the rules which the Council laid down.

The **Court of Justice** consisted of seven judges, although their number could be increased by a unanimous decision of the Council. It was assisted by advocates general, who were also appointed for six years by their governments. The Court ensured that the law was observed in the interpretation and application of the Treaty. It assessed the legality of acts of the Council and the Commission other than recommendations or opinions, when actions were brought on grounds of lack of competence, misuse of powers, or infringement of the essential procedural requirements of the Treaty or of any rule of law relating to its application.

Like the ECSC Treaty, the EEC Treaty provided for an advisory body. This was the Economic and Social Committee (ESC), which was made up of representatives of the various categories of economic and social activity: producers, farmers, workers, dealers, craftsmen and professional occupations. They were appointed for four years by a unanimous decision of the Council. The ESC comprised 24 Germans, 12 Belgians, 24 French, 24 Italians, 5 Luxembourgers and 12 representatives of the Netherlands. It had to be consulted by the Council or the Commission where the Treaty provided for this, and could be consulted in all other cases. It was set up following a proposal from the delegations from the Benelux countries, where such committees wielded considerable influence in the economic decision-making process.

D. The Treaty establishing the EAEC

The Treaty establishing Euratom, with its 225 articles and five annexes, provided for the same institutional pattern as both the other treaties, with an Assembly, a Council, a Commission

and a Court of Justice. The Assembly and an Economic and Social Committee (ESC) were to be shared institutions of the EEC and Euratom.

Euratom's mission was to contribute to the rapid formation and development of Europe's nuclear industries, to help improve the standard of living in the Member States and to further the development of trade with other countries. Its responsibilities were strictly limited to civil applications of nuclear energy. The Euratom Treaty also created the framework for a nuclear common market.

Compared with the progress being made on the common market front, progress with the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom) was slow, not least because of a failure to reach agreement on a number of important issues, for example the construction of a European isotope-separation plant. Euratom thus lost some of its importance. Nevertheless, Euratom's fundamental objectives were to foster research into and utilisation of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, and to encourage the development of relations with other countries.

IV. Reactions to the signing of the Treaties

A. In Belgium

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.

B. In France

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).

C. In Italy

The Italian Chamber of Deputies discussed the issue in the second half of July 1957 and wound up the debate on 30 July, approving ratification of the Treaties 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 offer 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.

D. In Luxembourg

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).

E. In the Netherlands

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.

F. In the FRG

On 3 May 1957, the Bundesrat carried out an initial examination of the bill authorising the ratification of the Treaties establishing the EEC and the EAEC. On the same day, it 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.

V. Conclusion

The signing of the Treaties establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom) in Rome on 25 March 1957 marked a key stage in the history of European integration. Less than five years after the entry into force of the Paris Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), and less than three years after the failure of the planned European Defence Community (EDC)

and the European Political Community (EPC), united Europe took an irreversible step forward towards integration, particularly since, unlike the Treaty establishing the ECSC (signed for 50 years), the Rome Treaties made no provision for a time limit or a withdrawal procedure.

Since its establishment in March 1957, 21 states have joined the European Community — subsequently the European Union — bringing the total number of Member States to 27.