

The inadequacy of the international organisations

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The inadequacy of the international organisations

Since it favoured greater European integration, the French Government considered that the European organisations that did exist in 1950, namely the Council of Europe and the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), were not up to the task. Despite the tireless efforts of many pro-European movements to establish a genuinely supranational body, these international institutions provided for little more than intergovernmental cooperation.

The Council of Europe, with vaguely defined powers in almost every area of public life, soon disappointed those militant pro-Europeans who had invested all their hopes in it. The Consultative Assembly in Strasbourg quickly proved to be just a parliamentary platform and a forum for dialogue between distinguished national delegates who had no responsibilities whatsoever towards an electorate. While it did debate and launch many projects, it had very little success in having them adopted by the governments which, de facto, retained all decision-making powers through the Committee of Ministers. Sidelined from the real economic, political and defence issues, the Council of Europe was mainly active in the areas of social policy, health and culture.

Created in April 1948, the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) was an intergovernmental organisation with a Council consisting of representatives from each member state and in which all decisions had to be taken unanimously. The OEEC was responsible for implementing the Marshall Plan, through which the United States provided massive aid to all European countries for the rebuilding of their economies, provided that they prepared a thorough inventory of their resources and jointly drew up an ambitious reconstruction programme. In response to the American offer, 16 Western European countries (the Federal Republic of Germany and the Free Territory of Trieste joined in 1949) reached agreement on how to allocate the aid under the Marshall Plan. However, they failed to implement effectively a joint programme of investment and reconstruction for their still very compartmentalised, national economies. The OEEC limited itself to drafting vague directives, without ever achieving a genuine integration of European markets. It was therefore a disappointment to those who supported the idea of a single European body. Nevertheless, the OEEC did play a role in liberalising intra-European trade on a multilateral basis and in currency stabilisation through the creation, between 1950 and 1958, of a European Payments Union (EPU). At the same time, it encouraged the modernisation of Europe's manufacturing base.

In 1947, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) also set up an Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) with a mandate to promote economic cooperation in Europe. It was the UN's first regional body, and its members included all European countries, as well as the United States and the Soviet Union. It amalgamated a number of organisations that the European governments had set up since 1945: the European Coal Organisation, the European Land Transport Organisation and the Emergency Economic Commission for Europe. But the Cold War soon paralysed the operation of the ECE. Apart from a few initiatives relating to coal distribution and the exchange of rolling stock, its activities were limited and of a confidential nature.