

'A single Executive will be able to take up office on 1 January 1966' from Communauté européenne

Caption: In April 1965, the monthly publication Communauté européenne sets out the reasons behind the merging of the executives of the three European Communities.

Source: Communauté européenne. Bulletin mensuel d'information. dir. de publ. FONTAINE, François ; Réd. Chef CHASTENET, Antoine. Avril 1965, n° 4; 9e année. Paris: Service d'Information des Communautés Européennes. "L'exécutif unique pourra entrer en fonction le 1er janvier prochain ", p. 4; 5.

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The first stage towards the merger of the Communities

A single Executive will be able to take up office on 1 January 1966

The ‘Six’ have just made a very important decision for the future of the European Community: on 2 March, the Council of Ministers of the Community finally agreed on how to merge the various executive bodies. The Treaty, signed on 8 April, must be ratified by the six national Parliaments before the end of the year so that a single Executive can be in place in Brussels by 1 January 1966.

Why should the executive bodies be merged?

For historical reasons, the European Communities were established in several stages. The ‘Six’ first established, on 18 April 1951, the European Coal and Steel Community, whose Executive, the High Authority, and its principal departments – employing roughly one thousand civil servants – were located in Luxembourg. Later, on 25 March 1957, the ‘Six’ signed the Treaty of Rome establishing Euratom and the European Economic Community, whose executive bodies, called ‘Commissions’, were located in Brussels.

This situation gave rise to a regrettable dispersal of the Community seats. To complicate matters further, the Secretariat of the Council of Ministers of the ECSC is located in Luxembourg while the Secretariat of the Council of Euratom and of the Common Market work in Brussels. The Court of Justice and the Secretariat of the Parliament are located in Luxembourg, (part-sessions of the European Parliament are held on the premises of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg). To make matters worse, the Consultative Committee of the ECSC and the Economic and Social Committee are both located in Brussels.

Such a situation had political as well as practical drawbacks: the practical aspect of this dispersal of Community business need not be spelt out. It is clear, in addition, that the existence of three executive bodies, managing three treaties with different rules, did not favour the development of a common energy policy.

How will the merger of the executive bodies work?

Since 1959, attempts had been made to resolve this abnormal situation. In 1961, the Netherlands Government proposed a plan to merge the executive bodies. A single Executive, made up of 9 Members, was to apply the three Treaties, which would not be amended save for the limited adjustments needed to merge the executive bodies and the Councils. The European Parliament approved the merger, on the same basis, in October 1961.

However, the actual merger was delayed because of differences between the six countries as to the scope of the reform: some countries gave priority to the merger of the Treaties and Communities before a merger of the executive bodies. Reviewed by the Council of Ministers of the Community from April 1963 onwards, the merger was subject to an initial agreement of principle by the ‘Six’ on 23 and 24 September 1963. This agreement was the result of the approximation of the views of the various countries, the merger of the executive bodies being seen as the first step towards the merger of the Communities. It was then assumed that this first step was to take effect by 1 January 1965, so that the merger of the Communities could become effective by 1 January 1967 at the latest.

The merger of the executive bodies, with no radical revision of Treaties, did not appear to create any major political difficulties. It did, however, involve delicate negotiations largely because of the material and political compensation requested by Luxembourg, capital of the ECSC. It was only on 2 March that agreement was reached on this issue. The ‘Six’ confirmed at the same time their agreement on the number of Members of the single Executive (which was to be 14 for three years, reducing to 9 by 31 December 1968 at the latest). The way was now open for the merger of the Communities which was to take place before the end of 1968.

Strengthening the common institutions

The merger of the executive bodies and of the Community institutions appeared at first to be a simple streamlining of administrative procedures. Its practical advantages were abundantly clear, although the compromise reached on 2 March did include a number of drawbacks in this respect.

At the same time, it was a political event of great importance: first of all, a single Executive would have more authority and more clout even if it had no more powers. And, secondly, the merger of the executive bodies was the first stage in the organic consolidation of European economic and social policy within a single Community.

But the task of merging the Treaties and the Communities, which the institutions were about to undertake, was to give rise to some difficult problems. It was the responsibility of the single Executive to propose solutions which would be pragmatic and efficient, bearing in mind the history of the Community. Mr Del Bo, President of the High Authority, stressed that the merger should constitute a synthesis of the three Treaties, maintaining the provisions of the ECSC Treaty which were justified by the specific problems of the coal and steel industry but which had also proved to be useful in the development of European integration in the economic and social sphere.

In the long term, another issue will undoubtedly appear: that of the institutional balance within the Community. Many feel the need to strengthen the powers of scrutiny of the European Parliament over the common institutions. The problem has already arisen with the Dutch demand that the management of the EAGGF should be properly scrutinised by the European Parliament.

It is to be hoped that these discussions will lead to the strengthening of the Community. In this respect, a new stage has begun.