

The Fouchet Plans

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The Fouchet Plans

After having his plans for the reform of NATO rejected by the Americans and British in 1959 and 1960, General de Gaulle partly focused his international activities on achieving a politically integrated Europe. In July 1960, he discussed his views on European political union with Germany's Chancellor Adenauer. De Gaulle's objective was to reform the European Communities, with the aim of establishing a Europe of States. To that end, his proposals included regular meetings between Ministers, the Heads of State or Government of the Six and senior officials in order to discuss specific political, economic, cultural and defence issues. He also proposed that an advisory assembly, composed of members of the national parliaments, should be created to support such meetings. Essentially, what de Gaulle proposed to Adenauer was none other than a sort of Franco-German confederation with common citizenship. He counted on the influence of the Franco-German partnership to gain the support of the other European partners for the building of an autonomous Europe. This led to the first Community negotiations, despite the Chancellor's guarded response and the differing views among the Six on the subject of British participation.

At a summit held in Paris on 10 and 11 February 1961, the Six agreed to develop political cooperation. De Gaulle accordingly proposed to his five partners the establishment of a Study Group composed of representatives of the six governments and responsible for studying the potential forms of diplomatic and political cooperation among the Member States of the European Economic Community (EEC). The Study Group was chaired by Christian Fouchet, a French diplomat and former Gaullist MP, and decided to establish two subcommittees. Meeting on 18 July 1961 in Bad Godesberg, near Bonn, the Six reiterated their intention to create a politically united Europe, but without defining its nature or scope.

On 19 October 1961, Christian Fouchet submitted to the Study Group an initial draft treaty (Fouchet Plan I), establishing an indissoluble union of States based on intergovernmental cooperation and respect for the identity of Member States and their peoples. It proposed cooperation, alongside the Community treaties, in the areas of foreign policy and defence, science, culture and human rights protection. In institutional terms, the draft treaty provided for the establishment of a Council composed of Heads of State or Government, which would meet three times a year and adopt decisions on the basis of unanimity. A Council of Foreign Ministers would cover the interim period. Under the draft treaty, the Assembly of the Communities would have merely an advisory role. The Council would be assisted by a Commission consisting of Member State diplomats representing their governments. The plan drew a distinction between the powers and responsibilities of the Community and those of the future Political Union.

Fearing French domination of the foreign policy of the Six, France's partners opposed the draft treaty as submitted. They also rejected any strengthening of the institutions' intergovernmental character, which they regarded as a threat to the independence and supranational nature of the Community bodies. Moreover, the Netherlands was reluctant to further complicate the Common Market enlargement negotiations under way with the United Kingdom or to jeopardise the ongoing discussions between Europe and America on the future of NATO. In the light of this opposition, de Gaulle hardened his stance and abandoned the compromises that the European negotiators had reached. On 18 January 1962, Christian Fouchet accordingly submitted a new version of the plan (Fouchet Plan II), which this time proposed to grant the Union the economic powers that had previously been the prerogative of the Communities, the latter becoming subordinate to the intergovernmental cooperation body. This second version, moreover, made no reference to NATO.

At the point when the Common Market was proceeding to its second stage of implementation, France's partners, notably the Benelux countries, once again lambasted and rejected the plan. They accordingly drew up counter-proposals for a more federalist approach, which were, in turn, rejected by the French Government. In early April, the Secretary-General of the Italian Foreign Ministry, Emilio Cattani, replaced Fouchet, who had been appointed High Commissioner to Algeria, as Chairman of the Study Group. Cattani proposed some new amendments but could not reconcile France's interests with those of the other European partners. Belgium and the Netherlands wanted to see the United Kingdom complete its accession to the EEC before moving forward with the implementation of Political Union. Consequently, the Foreign Ministers, meeting in Luxembourg on 17 April 1962, were forced to admit their failure to reach agreement. On

15 May, General de Gaulle sealed the breakdown in the attempts at political integration. At a sensational press conference, he condemned European federalist policies and openly criticised the game played by Britain and America.

The failure of the Fouchet Plans sparked off a series of crises, characterised by disagreement on the very nature of the European unification process, the powers of the Community institutions, European independence and solidarity with the USA. The Heads of State or Government did not meet again for seven years. This failure did, however, lead to a strengthening of Franco-German relations.