

'Bundestag debates European Treaties' from the Süddeutsche Zeitung (22 March 1957)

Caption: On 22 March 1957, three days before the signing in Rome of the Treaties establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EAEC or Euratom), the German daily newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung describes the tenor of the debates in the Bundestag on the European treaties and on the establishment of a Common Market.

Source: Süddeutsche Zeitung. Münchner Neueste Nachrichten aus Politik, Kultur, Wirtschaft und Sport. Hrsg. FRIEDMANN, Werner; GOLDSCHAGG, Edmund; SCHÖNINGH, Dr. Franz Josef; SCHWINGENSTEIN, August ; Herausgeber FRIEDMANN, Werner. 22.03.1957, n° 70; 13. Jg. München: Süddeutscher Verlag. "Bundestag erörtert Europa-Verträge", p. 1; 2.

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Bundestag debates European Treaties

Government statement by Hallstein calls Common Market ‘last chance for Europe’

Erhard restates his misgivings / objections by the SPD and FDP

From our Bonn office

Bonn, 21 March — The Treaties establishing the European Common Market and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom), which are to be signed in Rome next Monday, were debated by the Bundestag (Lower House) for the first time on Thursday. In a government statement read out by the State Secretary, Walter Hallstein, the Federal Government described the Treaties entered into by the six ECSC States as Europe’s last chance for survival. The Common Market would be no obstacle to the reunification of Germany or to interzonal trade, nor would it increase the cost of living in the Federal Republic. Without opposing the Treaties, the SPD accused the Federal Government of having supported a ‘retrograde social policy’ during the negotiations. It was also unclear whether the Common Market was intended to be anything more than a new weapon in the political conflict between the Western and Eastern blocs. The Federal Minister for Economic Affairs, Ludwig Erhard, repeated his economic reservations about the Economic Community but gave an assurance that he wholeheartedly supported it.

The government statement opened as follows: ‘We know that, today, a close association between the old European States is our only chance to preserve, or restore, Europe’s former position in the constellation of powers and, indeed, probably our last chance of survival, our only hope of preserving our continued freedom, our economic prosperity and our social progress.’ There was no further need for debate on the necessity of economic union, now that it had become abundantly clear that the preservation of freedom, improved standards of living and genuine prosperity could be achieved only within a broader economic area than that offered by any individual European State. In assessing the Treaties, it must not be forgotten that all parties had had to make sacrifices — very painful material sacrifices in some cases — in order to bring them into being, but such sacrifices were unavoidable if Europe were to survive.

In Mr Hallstein’s words, the Brussels Treaties would not be an obstacle to the *reunification* of Germany. The Federal Government had had it minuted that it would expect the Treaties to be reviewed in the event of reunification. The German view that a united Germany must have total freedom of action had been accepted by the participating States.

Interzonal trade would not be deprived by the Treaties of its special status as an internal matter for Germany; the interzonal border would not become a customs border. Mr Hallstein presented to the Bundestag an undertaking to that effect that was to be incorporated into the text of the Treaty. Safeguards had also been put in place to ensure that interzonal trade could not be undermined by triangular transactions through other Member States of the Community. Referring to the proposed free-trade zone, Mr Hallstein, rejected concerns that the Common Market might disrupt relations with third countries and the European organisations. The Federal Republic would meet all its multilateral trade obligations, in order to open the gates to free world trade and a liberal trade policy. The cost of living in the Federal Republic would not be increased as a result of the Common Market.

Mr Hallstein justified the contentious inclusion of the *Overseas Territories* in the Common Market by referring to guarantees enshrined in the Treaty that European aid would serve exclusively to further the genuine interests of the inhabitants of the Overseas Territories and would not lead to a resurgence of colonialism, which had now been generally and rightly rejected.

Mr Hallstein gave a general outline of the organisation of the European Economic Community, which would be based on four pillars: the Council of Ministers, the European Commission, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Court of Justice. There would also be an Economic and Social Committee, an auxiliary body with an advisory function.

The Federal Government went on to express its confidence that the establishment of the Common Market would prove a blessing for the German people and for all other participating States. The Treaty represented a painstakingly negotiated but sound compromise for all those involved. It was the *sine qua non* for the unimpeded economic development of Europe and a pledge of the political freedom and prosperity of the German people. Last but not least, the Treaty also offered genuine prospects for the future political union of Europe.

The debate was opened by the SPD economic affairs spokesman, Heinrich Deist. It was not entirely clear from his remarks whether the Social Democrats accepted the Treaties in their present form. At its most recent meeting, the SPD parliamentary group had expressed a very positive attitude towards the Common Market. Mr Deist summarised his party's misgivings about the Treaty as follows:

The Treaty provided further evidence that the Federal Government's international negotiating stance was one that favoured a 'retrograde social policy', since it was at the Government's instigation that all the provisions that would result in social progress had been deleted from the original draft. The welfare aspect of the Common Market, in terms of improving the lot of workers, raising living standards and redistributing incomes, was extremely small.

The Treaty — again at the instigation of the Federal Government — made no provision for an active common economic policy, the only way forward to a new, healthy welfare structure in Europe. Implicit in this was the general rejection of an active economic policy, meaning government action to influence economic trends by directing investment and influencing marketing and prices.

The most important — and hitherto unanswered — question, Mr Deist continued, was whether the European Economic Community had been conceived as a pawn in the ideological and military game of chess between Eastern and Western blocs or as a genuine instrument for the progressive and social evolution of Europe. The SPD could only support the Treaties if the latter were the case.

In the view of the SPD, there were still three questions that required clarification: whether the Treaty might not result in a disproportionate increase in customs duties on imports from areas outside the Common Market; whether Germany's involvement in the development of France's colonial possessions in Africa might not make the Federal Republic an 'accessory to French colonial domination'; and whether there was really an absolute guarantee that the interzonal border would not become a customs border as a result of the Treaty.

Erhard hoped for a more dynamic Treaty

The Federal Minister for Economic Affairs, Ludwig Erhard, defended his criticism of the Treaty against attacks from the SPD. He stressed that, if he was dissatisfied with the Treaty, it was only because he had hoped for something 'more dynamic' that would offer a swifter and more certain advance towards the economic unification of Europe. Despite certain economic misgivings, however, his response to the Treaty was an unqualified 'yes'.

It was true that there were articles in the Treaty where it was hard to separate the good things from the bad. But those, after all, were not the only articles that mattered — what was important was that the right people had approached the Treaty in the right way.

Mr Erhard explained that his criticism focused in the main on the numerous escape clauses in the Treaty, which expressed 'such fear of the Common Market' and seemed to cast doubt on the possibility of genuinely free competition. The Treaty should have placed more emphasis on the pursuit of a *sound* economic policy rather than on ways of escaping from the consequences of an *unsound* economic policy. But, as the Treaty had been the result of a compromise between differing economic viewpoints, it was probably the best that could have been achieved. The accusation by Mr Deist that the Federal Government had pursued a retrograde social policy during the negotiations that led to the European Treaties was rejected by Mr Erhard

as ‘pure calumny’.

Chancellor Adenauer appeared somewhat nervous during Mr Erhard’s remarks, especially those passages in which he expressed criticism of the Treaty.

Furler: No colonialism

For the CDU/CSU, Professor Hans Furler, President of the ECSC Common Assembly, spoke vigorously in favour of the Treaty. The CDU, he said, was also aware of the shortcomings of the Treaty and understood the sacrifices that had had to be made, especially by German industry. But nothing could be achieved without a degree of optimism, without faith in the future. No progress could be made in a spirit of ‘amateurishness and criticism’. The Treaty had created an important basis for the unification of Europe. The need now was for everybody to work together to ensure that that aim was achieved. In response to Mr Erhard’s criticisms, Professor Furler’s view was that it was neither possible nor desirable, within a space of five years, to cast aside economic constraints which, in some cases, had evolved over the course of centuries. Professor Furler was particularly critical of the view that the inclusion of the French Overseas Territories had anything to do with colonialism. Far from it: the contribution that the Community would make to the economic and cultural development of those Territories would help them to gain their freedom at the earliest possible date.

Speaking for the Free Democrats, the only party that had adopted a position of clear opposition to the Treaties, Mr Margulies said that his party’s concerns related more to the means than to the end. It was necessary to look closely at whether this path of mini-European integration was really the path that would lead to Europe. His misgivings had been in no way dispelled by listening to the Federal Minister for Economic Affairs. In the eight years since the founding of the OEEC, European trade figures for 17 States had been raised from zero to a respectable figure. More than 60 % of Germany’s foreign trade was conducted with other OEEC States. It was necessary to consider whether the European Economic Community might not result in a self-contained ‘little Europe’, partitioned off from other European trading partners by a wall of discriminatory customs duties. The establishment of the planned free-trade zone at the same time as the Economic Community would do much to alleviate the FDP’s misgivings on this point.