

Circular letter from Paul-Henri Spaak (London, 9 September 1944)

Caption: On 9 September 1944, Paul-Henri Spaak, Belgian Foreign Minister, officially informs Belgian diplomats of the conclusion of a transitional agreement on a customs union between the Governments of Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

Source: GOTOVITCH, José (sous la dir.). Documents diplomatiques belges 1941-1960, De l'indépendance à l'interdépendance. Tome I: Le gouvernement belge de Londres 1941-1944. Bruxelles: Académie royale de Belgique, 1998. 496 p. ISBN 2-8031-0158-0. p. 420.

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I am writing to inform you that, on 5 September, Belgium and Luxembourg, which have been linked by an economic union since 1921, signed a Customs Union with the Netherlands. Although transitional in nature, the Customs Union is designed to foster economic recovery and to create the conditions for a more permanent union at a later date. It follows on from the Monetary Agreement established between the three states on 21 October 1943. Under the Customs Union Agreement recently signed by the Foreign and Finance Ministers of the three states, the Belgium-Luxembourg Economic Union and the Netherlands adopted a common customs tariff that abolishes the collection of all customs duties among them. The common rules applicable to goods from third countries are liberal in nature. All basic food necessities, as well as supplies and equipment needed for resuming production, will be granted temporary duty-free entry. Those items will make up the bulk of imports during the period when the Agreement is in force.

The Agreement sets up four bodies responsible for coordinating the measures established by the Customs Union's common rules.

A Customs Administration Council¹ will table measures seeking to unify laws and regulations governing the collection of import and excise duties.

An Administrative Committee for the Regulation of External Trade will coordinate rules on import licences and import and export quotas.

A Council for Trade Agreements will coordinate agreements with third countries.

Declarations made by these bodies will be issued by the Ministers responsible, of which each contracting party is to appoint an equal number.

The Agreement will take effect, on a provisional basis, as soon as the governments of the liberated countries have taken up office.

Please find enclosed a copy of the Agreement. It is not confidential and may be used as a basis for discussion. Should it be lost, please notify your immediate superiors.

1. Assisted by a Committee for the Settlement of Customs Disputes