

## The transport pool

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Obviously inspired by the ‘black pool’ model for coal and steel, the French Member of Parliament Édouard Bonnefous tabled a proposal to the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe on 16 August 1950 for the creation of a supranational European transport authority within a structure wider than that of the Schuman Plan. He envisaged the creation of an authority with a 25-year mandate whose powers would extend to all forms of transport — road, rail and air, as well as port installations. The institution that he proposed would have three aims: to ensure the efficient use of existing transport systems, to avoid all kinds of uneconomic competition and to encourage investment in rational development plans. The institutions envisaged for this European Transport Community were more or less the same as those for the ECSC.

At the same time, the Strasbourg Assembly’s Committee on Economic Affairs adopted a Dutch plan, the aim of which was to create a single company for internal European air transport. The Assembly of the Council of Europe also discussed the creation of a European Transport Agency limited to the road and rail sectors, with a purely consultative brief, being solely responsible for the coordination of the various existing international bodies.

But these more or less ambitious plans still managed to elicit lively reactions from governments, which were disinclined to give up any more of their national sovereignty. Transport effectively controlled the whole of economic life, and any powers delegated to the planned authority would inevitably give it significant strategic power. All plans for a transport pool were swiftly handed over to a European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT), an international body established in October 1953 as part of the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC).

### **The European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT)**

On 9 December 1952, the OEEC Council decided to convene a conference of experts, which met in Paris from 18 March to 17 June 1953. By the same token, the French Transport Minister hosted a meeting in Paris between 19 and 31 January with his Austrian, Belgian, Dutch, German, Italian, Luxembourg and Swiss counterparts, who decided to meet again on a regular basis. On 17 June, the government experts submitted their report in which they recommended widening the scope of the meetings agreed in January in Paris and arranging them on a permanent basis. On 24 July 1953, the OEEC Council invited the Belgian Government to hold a constituent conference with responsibility for determining the status of a European Conference of Ministers of Transport. At the meeting in Brussels, which took place between 12 and 17 October 1953, the Transport Ministers of the OEEC member countries, with the exception of Ireland and Iceland but in the presence of the Spanish Transport Minister, signed the Protocol concerning the ECMT. This permanent international body, with its headquarters in Paris, consisted of a Council of Ministers of Transport, a Committee of Deputies, and an Administrative Secretariat integrated with the OEEC Secretariat. The Conference met at least once a year, its main objectives being to oversee the development and improved use of internationally important European transport systems in cooperation with the international organisations concerned. In practice, however, the ECMT rapidly got bogged down and became nothing more than a debating club.