

'Does Messina signify a new start?', from Luxemburger Wort (6 June 1955)

Caption: On 6 June 1955, the Luxembourg daily newspaper Luxemburger Wort ponders on the decisions taken on European issues at the end of the Conference of the Foreign Ministers of the six Member States of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), held in Messina from 1 to 3 June 1955.

Source: Luxemburger Wort. Für Wahrheit und Recht. 06.06.1955, n° 157; 106e année. Luxembourg: Imprimerie Saint-Paul. "Messina als neuer Start?", p. 1.

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Does Messina signify a new start?

P. S. — Anyone reading certain press and agency reports that had appeared before the Sicily Conference of the Foreign Ministers from the six countries in the Schuman Plan — and these were reports by those who wish to be regarded as thoroughly ‘European’ — could hardly manage to resist forming the impression that the Conference was doomed to be a complete flop from the very outset. However, if you read very carefully through the communiqué published by the six countries on Friday at the end of their meeting, you increasingly gain the different impression that, in fact, a step forward had been taken in Messina and Taormina.

Nothing concrete was actually achieved, and that was not, of course, the aim of the Conference. However, as the Conference President, Joseph Bech, stressed in his concluding address, the will to establish specific objectives had been reaffirmed. In other words, the Ministers reached the unanimous conclusion that not only did something have to be done, this something had to be along the lines of functional integration. For, under the present circumstances, the only way to make an approach towards attaining the objective of a unified Europe is through cooperation in specific fields.

The fact that such a positive result could be achieved in spite of all the gloomy forecasts is at least evidence that all the Ministers, without exception, had come to Messina with the best intentions and wanting to do something for Europe. This deserves to be emphasised. With regard to France, in particular, this is evidence of concessions that very definitely deserve to be recognised. While in Messina, the French Foreign Minister, Antoine Pinay, obviously knew how to escape as far as possible from the influence of the anti-European circles in the Quai d’Orsay, that is, from his closest colleagues.

Mr Pinay has the same people on his staff who were hitherto completely devoted to Pierre Mendès France in Brussels and in London. And it would certainly not have been in line with Mr Mendès France’s thinking to approach decision-making on the question of the future procedure to be followed with such a proposal; Mr Pinay proposed the appointment of an eminent politician to act as the dynamic factor that would accelerate the preparatory work for a European integration conference. An eminent politician of this kind will surely find that his sole task is to ensure that the preparatory work does not grind to a halt and that, by 1 October, a basis will actually have been created on which the Foreign Ministers can build.

Some positive results of this Conference in Messina and Taormina are the decision to appoint this eminent politician and the setting of 1 October as the deadline. The fact that the Ministers are serious about this is further underlined by the substance of the final communiqué. This explicitly emphasises that the commission of experts first has to submit an interim report, which would then be discussed by the Ministers — also before 1 October. Somehow, it suddenly seems that Europe has now emerged from the immobile state into which it had slumped after the deadlock on the issues of political unification and of the EDC.

As we said at the beginning, Messina was evidence of the good will of the six Foreign Ministers. And this good will made it easier for the Conference President, Joseph Bech, to deliver himself of his extremely delicate task. As nearly all the Italian newspapers have reported, Mr Bech conducted this Conference, which was to be so crucial for Europe, with extraordinary skill and with a level of tact that has received unreserved recognition. For, if it had been an obvious failure, it would have surely taken a very long time before anyone would have spoken of Europe or of European unity again. Mr Bech knew how to bridge the differences and to bring the initially conflicting opinions and viewpoints closer together. Apparently, it was reported in the Italian press that this quickly became known outside the Conference as well, so that, wherever Bech appeared in public, he was always the object of spontaneous demonstrations of support.

The Messina Conference of the six countries thus had all the appearance of ushering in a new chapter in European development. It goes without saying that it would be rash to imagine that everything will go smoothly from now on, and that by 1 October everything will be in perfect order. The Conference that is now to be prepared by the experts will bring together a number of countries, several of which were not present in Messina. What will be Britain’s attitude, for example, to the plans of the Six?

To what degree will it declare itself in favour of integration on a functional basis, after it has been so clearly opposed to any political merger and still is? How will third countries react when they are automatically involved, once the plans for integration spread into the area of the OEEC?

And what will be the attitudes among the Six, once it comes to the practical implementation of the decisions taken in Messina? We referred above to the current of opinion in certain groups in the Quai d'Orsay. In Bonn, too, the differences of opinion are becoming noticeable. The people around the Federal Minister, Ludwig Erhard, who are focused on the economy, are far more sceptical about an expansion of the principle of European integration than the purely political groups surrounding Konrad Adenauer and Heinrich von Brentano.

These are all questions which have still to be answered and upon the answer to which much, if not everything, will depend. The start made in Messina is most certainly not a reason for pessimism about Europe. Whether optimism is appropriate, only time will tell. At present, all the options are still open. That does, at least, constitute some progress after all the setbacks that the European idea has had to suffer in the course of the past year.