

'What form will the European Political Community take?', from Le Figaro (25 November 1953)


Caption: On 25 November 1953, the French daily newspaper Le Figaro ponders on the form that a future European Political Community (EPC) might take and on the powers that it might wield.

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Before the Hague Conference

II. — What form will the European Political Community take?

From the very beginnings of the EDC, the Six had envisaged the creation of a democratically elected supranational political authority that would exercise powers laid down in current or future treaties. Without waiting for ratification of the EDC, they decided to make a start on work in this direction.

A preliminary draft, drawn up early this year by the ECSC Assembly, was considered in October in Rome by diplomatic experts, who set out the positions of their respective governments on the issue.

On the eve of the Hague Conference, during which the six Foreign Ministers will issue clear instructions with a view to the drawing up of a final draft of the treaty, it is already possible, despite the controversial issues and the unresolved problems, to see the outline of the future Political Community.

The governmental positions are quite close on the subject of the institutions, and an agreement looks achievable on the two main issues — the Parliament and the Executive.

The Parliament would have two bodies. The first would be a *People's Chamber* comprising local representatives elected throughout the Community by universal suffrage. A law in each Member State would define the election arrangements, and seats would be allocated via a weighted system similar to the one provided for in the EDC Treaty and adopted by the Assembly. The second body, an *Upper Chamber*, would represent the Member States and would probably be an elected Senate with equal powers.

The Executive would also comprise two bodies. The first would be a supranational body, the *Executive Council*, which would replace the High Authority of the ECSC and the Commissariat of the European army. It would carry out the executive duties relating to the new tasks that would eventually be entrusted to the Community. The second would be a national body, the *Council of Ministers* of Foreign Affairs or of the Heads of Government of the Member States. Its job, as specified in the existing treaties, would be to approve unanimously, or by majority vote, the decisions of the Executive Council and to deliver opinions or issue general directives.

Two important issues concerning the stability and the independence of the supranational Executive have yet to be settled. When the Political Community begins functioning, it will not have a solid administrative apparatus like those in the old nation states that, through experience and traditions, are able to remedy the inconveniences of recurring ministerial crises.

While effective control of the supranational Executive would be ensured by means of the Assembly of the Community, some precautions would also have to be taken to avoid frequent political crises. As suggested in the preliminary draft, one possibility could be the *constructive censure* procedure, requiring a qualified majority to throw out the entire Executive Council.

Moreover, it seems vital, in order to preserve the independence and the supranational nature of the Executive Council, that its members should be chosen without any intervention by the Council of Ministers. This issue has not been resolved, as France wants the President of the Executive to be appointed by national ministers.

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While an agreement on the institutions looks fairly easy to achieve, a compromise on the key issue of the powers of the future Community will be more difficult.

The Six all agree on the final aim of creating a common market based on the free movement of goods, services, capital and people. They also maintain that the surest and easiest way to attain economic integration would be through measures to establish a generalised common market, rather than by the successive intervention of the various sectors of the economy.

However, France considers that, as things now stand, the powers of the new Community should be limited to coal, steel and defence, that the immediate creation of a generalised common market would cause considerable difficulties, that it should be introduced very cautiously and that, at all events, any new expansion of powers should flow from new intergovernmental agreements.

Some of our partners, however, want the treaty on the Political Community to include an immediate undertaking gradually to eliminate all quantitative restrictions and customs duties. The Dutch, in particular, want a clause in the treaty requiring Member States to set up a genuine customs union by a pre-determined deadline. In justifying their position, the Dutch not only point to economic considerations: they also declare that, if the treaty does not allow new steps to be made towards European integration and the consequent advantages in the areas of production and living standards, then the people, who will be called upon to elect the European Parliament, will lose interest in the new institutions.

There is serious disagreement; however, this does not prevent us from hoping for a solution that reconciles the two positions. Could we not, for example, annex to the treaty a sort of economic protocol that would go some way towards satisfying our partners?

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