

'Conference on European Revival opens today in Brussels', from Le Figaro (10 July 1955)

Caption: On 10 July 1955, the French daily newspaper Le Figaro outlines the role of the Intergovernmental Committee, chaired by the Belgian Foreign Minister Paul-Henri Spaak, set up in connection with European revival.

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Conference on European Revival opens today in Brussels

The meeting of experts that begins today in Brussels is one link in what has become a long chain of events that includes the resignation of Mr Jean Monnet as President of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in protest at government inaction on European integration; the Benelux memorandum proposing the establishment of a broad common market and, at the same time, specific organisations for transport, conventional energy and atomic energy; the Messina Conference during which the Foreign Ministers of the six Member States of the EEC adopted a watered-down version of the Benelux text and decided that a Conference should be held to draw up one or more drafts of the Treaty before 1 October; and, lastly, the appointment of Mr Spaak, Belgian Foreign Minister, to host the Conference.

With some hindsight, we are now better able to judge the work done at Messina. The Conference got off to a halting start, but, by the end, it had got into its stride.

It decided to convene a number of experts, but it was unclear whether the aim was to prepare for Europe or to stifle it. However, now the doubts have been cleared up, and the reasons behind Mr Spaak's appointment to supervise the work are evident. The Belgian Minister is both congenial and unflinching, but he would never accept, under any pretext, that we should all mark time while singing 'Let's go' like so many stage soldiers. His resounding resignation demonstrated that he will not allow his name to be used to lend dignity to the burial of the European project.

To a large extent, it is France's attitude that will determine how far Europe will go. In his Bourges speech, Mr Edgar Faure spelled out very clearly his desire to make unambiguous headway. The applause that greeted his words showed that the public agrees with him. Mr Félix Gaillard, who will head the French delegation, has been given positive instructions.

The date of 1 October will probably come and go. Trying to settle such complex problems during holiday time would be attempting the impossible, even under the temperate skies of Brussels. Today, no more than initial contacts will be established and an Atomic Energy Committee, probably the most important one of the Conference, will be set up.

The unusual feature of this meeting is that the British have agreed to attend. But what they aim to achieve is still a mystery. Some people are even going so far as to wonder, quite erroneously, whether they have been invited to attend so that the Conference will fail. The desire to build as broad a Europe as possible is very strong among Europeans. Moreover, while the British have little interest in our discussions about problems concerning canals and railways, they are very keen on the European market, and it would be unthinkable for atomic energy regulations to be adopted without their participation in the discussions.

What will the outcome of the Conference be? It will probably create a number of disparate bodies, with arbitrary boundaries demarcating them. The difficulty is that the problems taken up are so many and varied. Talks may be held on a common market for coal, for example, or transport, but a common market would make little sense for atomic energy or problems concerning investment and open access to raw materials. While Switzerland and Austria have little to say about coal and steel, their input is indispensable in the case of transport and electricity, areas where those two countries hold a key position.

Over and above the apparent disorder, one fact is inescapable. Europeans are working to pool increasingly vast and sensitive sectors. The bodies being created are no longer accountable to governments, but rather to a parliamentary assembly that, sooner or later, will be elected by universal suffrage.

Europe will, beyond a doubt, be the crux of the discussions about to open in Brussels.

J. L.