

Meeting of members of the Assembly's Bureau and the chairmen of the political groups (Brussels, 5 May 1953)

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Minutes of the meeting of members of the Assembly's Bureau and the chairmen of the political groups, held on Tuesday 5 May 1953 at the Palais de la Nation, Brussels

Mr Spaak opened the meeting at 11.10 a.m.

Present: Mr Spaak, Mr Fohrmann, Mr Teitgen, Mr Delbos and Mr Sassen.

Apologies for absence: Mr Puender, Mr Guy Mollet and Mr Vixseboxse.

Agenda: Exchange of views on the formation and funding of political groups in the Common Assembly.

Mr Delbos thought that the appropriation entered in the budget was too high. He was not much in favour of political groups which were too rigid and certainly not in favour of permanent group secretariats which operated all the time.

Mr Sassen thought that, since the various political parties were not yet sufficiently integrated in Europe as European political parties, it was reasonable to expect the Community to take measures, perhaps provisionally, to ensure that the political groups functioned properly. In this respect, the situation in the Common Assembly was different from that in the national parliaments. He did not see a need for large permanent secretariats, but that was not to say that each group should not be free to appoint one or two people to oversee the smooth running of the groups. To that end, a fixed amount could be granted immediately to each of the groups set up.

Mr Delbos, fearing a negative reaction from the general public, would prefer the groups' funding to come from contributions paid by the members themselves.

Mr Spaak thought the groups should start to establish themselves properly, but that the first year should be regarded as a trial period and that the resources available should be used prudently. Perhaps it might be possible to find three offices in the secretariat of the Common Assembly which the group secretaries could occupy on a temporary basis.

Mr de Nerée, Secretary-General of the Common Assembly, said that this solution was not practicable.

Mr Delbos was against the whole principle of the groups having secretariats.

Mr Spaak said that the Assembly had outlined its position on the question of groups at its meeting of 11 March 1953 and had instructed the Bureau to convene the group chairmen so that rules might be drawn up which would be valid for the year. The appropriation had, at all events, been approved.

Mr Sassen added that the political groups already had some justification for their existence in the Assembly's Rules of Procedure, since the rule dealing with the formation of committees talked of a 'fair reflection of political affinities'.

Mr Teitgen again raised the question of public reaction. He confirmed that a dim view would be taken, in France, of Members of the European Assembly voting to give themselves funds. He realised that the Bureau was obliged to carry out the remit that it had been given, but he was adamant that the structure of the groups, which had not yet reached maturity, should not be too rigid.

Mr Sassen thought that, for the time being at least, the group leader should be a politician, a member of Parliament, who would be helped out occasionally by one or two paid staff.

Mr Teitgen was against the existence in Luxembourg of permanent secretaries whose activities might exceed the actual intentions of the groups they represented.

Mr Delbos wanted to avoid any measures which might lead to excessively tight whipping; in some cases, he thought that whipping might jeopardise the Assembly's work.

Mr Sassen agreed that caution was called for, but it should not prevent the groups from becoming properly established. To that end, the necessary funds might be apportioned as follows:

The Assembly would grant to each political group a fixed sum for each financial year. That sum would be the same for all the groups, regardless of their numerical size. In addition, groups would receive a fixed amount for each member of the group. In this way, the groups would receive financial support proportional to their numerical size.

Mr Fohrmann was in favour of centres (secretariats) being set up for the groups. In all events, it was necessary to encourage a greater number of meetings within the groups. It was natural for this work to be funded by the Common Assembly because members did not receive a fixed parliamentary salary, unlike their counterparts in the national parliaments.

Mr Fohrmann endorsed the idea that the secretary in charge should be a Member of Parliament assisted, where necessary, by an officer who was not a representative of the group.

Mr Delbos thought that even that small-scale structure might create too much of a power centre within the groups which would limit the freedom of the Members of Parliament.

Mr Spaak noted that thoughts on the organisation and functioning of the groups were not as yet clear-cut. Accordingly, he suggested a prudent transitional system which would apply during the next financial year (1953–1954). Groups would still decide how their budget was used and would be responsible for it, but part of the appropriation approved by the Assembly would be broken down as follows:

each group would have:

(a) a fixed sum of BEF 500 000 plus

(b) a sum proportional to the numerical size of the group and calculated *pro rata* on the basis of the number of members is the amount of BEF 10 000 per member.

After Mr Sassen, Mr Delbos, Mr Teitgen and Mr Spaak had spoken, it was unanimously agreed that these appropriations would be granted only to the groups as a whole and that no payments would be made to members individually.

Mr Teitgen thought that this system could be only temporary and would have to be totally abandoned later on. He was more in favour of increasing the *per diem* paid to members of the Assembly, an increase which would be paid by the members themselves to their groups.

Mr Sassen said that this system would not work very well and had the drawback of giving the impression to the outside world that members of parliament had awarded themselves a pay rise.

Mr Teitgen agreed.

Mr Spaak reiterated that any communication on the subject of funding for the groups should emphasise that there would be no consequent additional payments to the members of the Assembly.

Replying to Mr Fohrmann's renewed insistence that offices should be provided for the group secretariats, Mr Spaak said that the three groups appeared not to agree on this, and so the question therefore had to remain open.

Minimum number of members in order for a group to be recognised as a group

After an exchange of views discussing the matter, the Bureau and the group chairmen decided to stick to the minimum of nine proposed by the Committee on the Rules of Procedure.

Mr Spaak said that this figure had been calculated in line with the custom in national parliaments, by dividing the total number of Assembly members by the number of members in the small committees. This would, in some cases, make it easier to secure a fair reflection of political affinities in the committees, since there would be one committee member for every group of at least nine members.

Mr Delbos raised the question of allied members and asked if they would count as actual members of the group.

Mr Spaak said that this was a matter for the groups internally and not for the Bureau.

Inclusion of group chairmen in the Committee of Presidents provided for in Rule 11 of the Common Assembly's Rules of Procedure

Mr Sassen said that the essential remit of the Committee of Presidents was to set the agenda, so it would be very useful to have the group chairmen included in it.

Mr Delbos was afraid that this would make it all the easier for the groups to impose a binding mandate.

Mr Spaak thought the very nature of the political groups in the Assembly ruled out any possible chance of such binding mandates being given. He did not think that the inclusion of group chairmen in the Committee of Presidents was a necessary consequence of the formation of political groups. But he suggested that this matter be referred to the Committee on the Rules of Procedure.

It was so decided, unanimously.

On the whole issue of funding for the groups, the Bureau would submit a proposal to the Assembly, the text of which is annexed to these minutes.

Mr Delbos reserved his final position on this proposal.

The meeting was closed at 12.45 p.m.

Annex

Funding of the political groups

Proposal from the Bureau of the Common Assembly

The Bureau intends to submit the following proposal to the Assembly:

For the 1953–1954 financial year, and in connection with the appropriation provided for in Chapter 1, Item 105 of the budget, the Assembly decides to grant each political group which is recognised as a group and has at least nine members: a fixed sum of BEF 500 000, plus a sum proportional to the numerical size of the group and calculated *pro rata* on the basis of the number of members in the amount of BEF 10 000 per member.

These appropriations shall be given only to the groups as a whole, and no payments shall be made to members individually.

The Bureau, after consulting the political group chairmen, shall determine the practical and administrative procedures for the implementation of this decision.