

'Roger De Staercke elected President of the Economic and Social Committee' from Le Soir

Caption: On 14 October 1959, the Economic and Social Committee of the European Communities elects its first President, the Belgian Roger De Staercke, along with all the members of its Bureau. In the days which follow, the Bureau gets ready to enter into negotiations with the Council regarding the provisions of the Committee's Rules of Procedure.

Source: Le Soir. 16.10.1959. Bruxelles: S.A. Rossel. "M. Roger De Staercke élu président du Comité économique et social", p. 7.

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Mr Roger De Staercke elected President of the Economic and Social Committee

On Wednesday, Mr Roger De Staercke, a board member of the Federation of Belgian Industries, was elected President of the Economic and Social Committee of the European Communities for a term of two years. Mr De Staercke won by 84 votes to nil, with 4 abstentions, in the second ballot. In the first ballot he had received 50 votes as against 35 for Mr Louis Major, the Secretary-General of the General Federation of Belgian Workers, who then stood down.

In the late afternoon, following many discussions and a sometimes disorganised debate, the Committee elected its Bureau in full. By 74 votes to 4, with one abstention, the Bureau was appointed as follows:

President: Mr De Staercke (Belgium, Employers).

Vice-Presidents: Mr Rosenberg (Germany, Workers) and Mr Cantoni (Italy, Farmers and Small Businesses).

Members: Mr Boulladoux (France, Workers), Mr Falkenheim (Germany, Employers), Mr de Precigout (France, Employers), Mr Roemers (Netherlands, Workers), Mr Rollinger (Luxembourg, Farmers and Small Businesses) and Mr Storti (Italy, Workers).

As this allocation shows, the Workers group was favoured to the detriment of the Small Businesses group, which has only two representatives in the Bureau. It was, however, understood that this would in no way establish a precedent. Furthermore, the Committee expressed the wish — by 58 votes to 12, with 7 abstentions — to increase the number of members of the Bureau to 15, as this would allow fuller and fairer representation of the various groups on the Committee, particularly the representatives of the Overseas Territories. At the request of the workers, that number might subsequently even be increased to 16 so that the President could preside ‘above the groups’.

The proposed enlargement (the legality of which was nonetheless strongly disputed by one of the lawyers present, Professor Baldi), will have to be negotiated by the Bureau with the Council of Ministers of the Community at the same time as most of the Committee’s Rules of Procedure. It is known that some of the Six, the Germans in particular, have taken the view that the Committee’s initial claims as to powers and responsibilities are excessive.

It does not, however, appear that that issue is likely to be the subject of real disagreement. On the contrary, those close to the new President consider that negotiations might end positively as early as the end of the month along the lines of the practical arrangement proposed by the Belgian Government, namely to give the Economic and Social Committee the means to perform its role as the technical adviser to the Communities but not the power to become a corporate chamber.

Concluding business on Wednesday, Mr De Staercke thanked Mr Van Leeuwen, the oldest member of the Committee, who had chaired the first debates, and his advisers, who included two representatives of the French territories in Africa. ‘Their presence among us’, stated the new President, ‘is a symbol of the community of interests between peoples.’

Mr De Staercke also called on the Committee to show proof of real activity and to avoid the pitfalls of verbosity, otherwise the Committee would rapidly create an impression of sterility. He reiterated that warning in strong terms a little later after the Committee had become somewhat lost in legal quibbles over whether it was entitled to establish a working group with responsibility for studying issues of health protection against atomic radiation.

The decision to set up such a working group was then taken. Professor Medi, a Vice-President of the Euratom Commission, also drew the attention of the Economic and Social Committee to the urgent nature of that issue.

Ch. R.

