

Conference on the establishment of a Council of Europe: extract concerning the name of the organisation (London, 3 and 4 May 1949)

Caption: Extract from the minutes of the Conference on the establishment of a Council of Europe, held at St James's Palace in London from 3 to 5 May 1949, concerning the issue of the name of the organisation.

Source: Archives historiques du Conseil de l'Europe - Historical Archives of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg. Conference for the establishment of a Council of Europe, 0120.

Copyright: (c) Historical archives of the Council of Europe

URL:

http://www.cvce.eu/obj/conference_on_the_establishment_of_a_council_of_europe_extract_concerning_the_name_of_the_organisation_london_3_and_4_may_1949-en-5ae7c126-8b63-4fab-86da-efd7403c610a.html

Publication date: 14/05/2013

Conference on the establishment of a Council of Europe (London, 3-5 May 1949)

Minutes of the Conference held at St. James's Palace, beginning at 10:30 a.m. on Tuesday, 3rd May

[...]

7. Name of the Organisation

In the course of a long discussion the following points were made:

M. Schuman (France) considered that the term European Union marked more appropriately the aim which the Conference was pursuing than the term "Council of Europe," the latter being really only the instrument. It was important to start with a name which would keep up with events and not be merely transitory. The danger which some of his colleagues foresaw that "European Union" would give the impression that a federation of States was being started was not real; equal danger lay in the mention of the word "Europe" in "Council of Europe" since at the present stage the Council did not embrace the whole of Europe.

Signor Sforza (Italy) said that he understood the reason for having a modest title like "Council of Europe" and that the organisation would be strong if it was built up slowly and solidly; if M. Briand had failed in an earlier attempt to unite Europe it was because he had wanted to make too big and important an organisation too quickly. On the other hand he felt strongly that if the Conference were to adopt such a modest title they would be accused of opposition to the idea of European Union, which would be fatal. He therefore favoured "European Union!"

Vicomte Obert de Thieusies (Belgium) thought that "European Union" had an appeal to the spirit. Moreover, it followed the ideas expressed by most of the five Powers during the preliminary meeting in Paris. It was not restrictive, and it would make a better impression. Moreover, he doubted whether it was linguistically correct for a "Council" to have an "Assembly."

M. Unden (Sweden) supported the "Council of Europe." Perhaps "European Union" might correspond to the more distant purpose which they had in mind, but so ambitious a name might give the impression that the organisation was on a scale greater than was the case.

M. Lange (Norway) also supported "Council of Europe." It was most important to any public opinion with them and there was the danger that to use "European Union" now might cause public opinion to be disillusioned when it was seen how modest the actual organic development really was at its start.

Mr. Bevin (United Kingdom) said that he preferred "Council of Europe." He had in mind the design which would have to be given to European organisations as events developed in the next few years and especially when, in 1952, Marshall Aid came to an end. It was necessary to have some organisation of the kind now conveyed by the term "Council of Europe," which would be tentative and easily adaptable to the new circumstances which might arise. A better title could be found later on in the light of developments; at present there was no union, but merely a Council which had greater unity as one of its aims. It was important not to mislead public opinion. He felt that it was right to regard the organisation as one body, the Council of Europe, which would consist of a Committee of Ministers and an Assembly; the title "European Union" would give the impression that there were to be two distinct bodies, the Committee of Ministers and the Assembly.

M. Rasmussen (Denmark) suggested "Consultative Association of European States."

It was agreed to revert to this question at a later stage.

[...]

The Conference reassembled at St. James's Palace at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, 4th May

[...]

39. Name of the Organisation (see Item 7 above)

This question having been left undecided the previous day, the Conference reverted to it.

Mr. MacBride (Irish Republic) asked that whatever name might be adopted, it should only be one name, since there were so many international bodies that public opinion was already confused.

M. Schuman (France) said that "Council of Europe" was not, and was not likely to be, the popular name for the organisation; public opinion had a habit of making up its own language and he was sure that French public opinion would use "European Union." He did not, however, wish to embarrass his colleagues or exaggerate the importance of his remarks.

Signor Sforza (Italy) thought that since agreement could not be reached on the term "European Union" and since the "Council of Europe" was only the instrument of the organisation, it was necessary to find some alternative for "European Union." M. Schuman's remarks were very much to the point but they did not, he thought, represent a way out since the popular imagination was apt to run to such phrases as "Benelux" and it was important not to follow the habit of the Dictators of creating popular catchwords.

M. Rasmussen (Denmark) recalled that he had the previous day suggested "Consultative Association of European States"; that had not found acceptance, so he now suggested "Consultative European Union."

M. Lange (Norway) said that in his country "Council of Europe" was not only acceptable but had indeed already been accepted by public opinion.

Vicomte Obert de Thieusies (Belgium) was, like M. Schuman, prepared to give way to the general opinion in favour of "Council of Europe."

It was agreed to adopt the title "Council of Europe."

[...]