


The Venice Conference

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On 29 and 30 May 1956, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the six Member States of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) met at the Cini Foundation on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice to discuss the report to the Foreign Ministers submitted by the Heads of Delegation. The report, dated 21 April 1956, had been finalised in the preceding months by the Intergovernmental Committee set up by the Messina Conference.

The Conference, chaired by Christian Pineau, the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, was attended by Walter Hallstein (Federal Republic of Germany), Paul-Henri Spaak (Belgium), Maurice Faure, French State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Gaetano Martino (Italy), Joseph Bech (Luxembourg) and Johan Willem Beyen (Netherlands).

In Venice, the Ministers outlined the views of their respective governments on the proposals set out in the Spaak Report and noted their agreement to its adoption as a basis for future talks on the drawing up of a treaty establishing a general common market and a treaty creating a European atomic energy organisation (Euratom). Responding to the reservations expressed by the German Delegation on the Euratom plan, Christian Pineau reassured his partners as to France's intentions. However, he wanted the Euratom treaty to be drawn up before the Common Market treaty. Similarly, he suggested that the transition from the first to the second stage could not be automatic after a four-year period and that it would be necessary to lay down precisely in the treaty the objectives to be achieved in the first stage and to make the transition from that to the second stage conditional upon actual attainment of those objectives. But Pineau also emphasised that France was concerned that the reduction of customs duties and the harmonisation of social security contributions and a prior solution to questions of equal pay for men and women, paid holiday and overtime rules should be dealt with simultaneously. Finally, Pineau stated that, for France, the inclusion of the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) in the common market was a prerequisite for the conclusion of a treaty.

At the end of the talks, the Ministers agreed in particular that:

- a single Intergovernmental Conference should be held in Brussels and instructed to draw up the Common Market and Euratom treaties;
- Paul-Henri Spaak should be appointed chairman of the Conference in order to continue in the coordinating role that he had performed in the Intergovernmental Committee;
- the Intergovernmental Conference should start work on 26 June 1956, with a recess during the holiday period;
- the governments should appoint a single person to head their delegation and take part in the work of the Committee of Heads of Delegation;
- the matters referred to in the third part of the Spaak Report, i.e. the sectors requiring urgent action (energy, aviation, post and telecommunications), should be dealt with by the branch of the Intergovernmental Conference that would be responsible for the common market.

The Ministers deliberately avoided going into the technical details at too early a stage and agreed to meet periodically in order to hear reports on the work of the Heads of Delegation and to take any political decisions that might be necessary, since they were already anticipating having to take decisions on the possible military use of nuclear power and the inclusion of the OCTs in the common market. However, in view of the complexity of the latter issue, partly because of the varying status of the territories in question, the Ministers agreed not to take a decision until after they had referred the matter to the national bodies concerned.

With a view to taking action on the Messina Resolution, the Ministers also decided that the forthcoming treaties should include provisions setting out the arrangements for accession or association by third countries prepared to cooperate with the work of the Six on an equal footing. They therefore decided that the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the Council of Europe and the European Conference of Ministers of Transport (ECMT) should no

longer be asked to participate in the negotiations but should be kept informed of their progress.