

## Interview with Charles Rutten: the work of the Spaak Committee (The Hague, 29 November 2006)

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[Étienne Deschamps] A few weeks after the Messina Conference, the Spaak Committee met in Brussels. There were six national delegations, you were in the Dutch delegation, so how did things go? You told us that Spaak played a major leadership role. How was that reflected in the proceedings, the organisation, work methods, in the preparation of what was to become a Spaak Report? How did this Committee actually work and what specifically was the role of the Chairman, Paul-Henri Spaak?

[Charles Rutten] This Committee began its work like all intergovernmental committees, that is working groups were set up, subjects were divided into different sectors, and for each sector there was a working group that met and discussed in fine detail the pros and cons of a customs union or of the other options etc. It all became very, very technical and of course things got bogged down and no progress was made.

Now I don't remember very well how long we carried on like that, but then Spaak at a certain point said, 'Listen, my friends, I have the impression, having studied in detail all the documents that have been prepared ...' (which wasn't true, because he hadn't read a single document, as he admitted later, but he really felt that they weren't going to get anywhere that way). He said, 'I've studied all the documents, and I think the time has come to draw conclusions. But to be able to draw conclusions we first of all now need a single document that summarises the various aspects and that contains specific proposals — for or against.' So he set up a small working group, the leading member was Pierre Uri who was one of Jean Monnet's advisers, and then there was Von der Groeben, the German, and there was Hupperts on the Belgian side. They settled down on the Côte d'Azur, in a splendid villa. And after, I believe, three or four weeks, they came up with the Spaak Report which was really a masterpiece of clarity and concision etc. It was, by the way, mainly thanks to Pierre Uri who had practically drafted the document on his own. This document was then discussed by the Spaak Committee of course ... many experts were shocked, [they said], 'But that's not at all what we discussed,' because the draft report reached the conclusion that an economic union was feasible and that, if we wanted to follow that route, it had to be an economic union, so it was entirely Beyen's idea that was being used. But they added specifics on what it meant for each of the various areas. There were details about the institutional structures etc. It was really a complete blueprint of what a treaty on economic union might look like.

Spaak pushed through its adoption. There were delegations that presented about 200 amendments to the text which were all swept aside by Spaak who said, 'No, no, my friends, it is a political document now; it should now be submitted to the ministers.' And that is what happened, so Spaak took his document and submitted it to the ministerial conference that was to meet in Venice some time later.

But as I said at the beginning, Spaak was absolutely crucial in all that ...