

The work of the Spaak Committee

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URL: http://www.cvce.eu/obj/the_work_of_the_spaak_committee-en-42cd3d3b-e28b-4b4a-8e58-8107b106ac15.html

Last updated: 08/07/2016



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The work of the Intergovernmental Committee set up by the Messina Conference in Brussels started on 9 July 1955 and ended on 20 April 1956, when the Heads of Delegation of the six Member States of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) approved the Spaak report.

The Intergovernmental Committee steering committee was composed of Paul-Henri Spaak, the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs, the six heads of delegation and the United Kingdom representative. Its role was to organise, direct, coordinate and monitor the work of the committees and government delegates, with the assistance of experts. The committees examined the common market, investments and social issues, conventional energy, nuclear energy and public transport and works. Several highly specialised subcommittees would then be set up, depending on the topics raised, which might relate to either customs or nuclear matters.

In accordance with the outcome of the resolution adopted by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Six in Messina on 3 June 1955, the Spaak Committee steering committee established the common market as a working hypothesis for the committees; all the other work to be carried out was in fact organised around that main objective. Although it had not been mentioned at the Messina Conference, the question of agriculture soon arose. The debates on transport and conventional energy added to the difficulties. By the beginning of November, the Spaak Committee decided that it had sufficient technical reports for the Heads of Delegation to be able to move on to drawing up political agreements. The discussions then focused on the nature and details of the future Common Market, in regard to the abolition of trade barriers, customs arrangements with third countries, social and financial harmonisation and the establishment of common institutions. The Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Six were convened when it was necessary to take final decisions. Hence they met in Brussels on 11 and 12 February 1956. The Spaak report, drawn up by the closest colleagues of the Belgian minister, was published in April 1956. It was approved by the Six at the Venice Conference on 29 and 30 May and was used as the basis for discussion in the work of the Intergovernmental Conference for the Common Market and Euratom from July 1956.