The question of the seat of the institutions

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The Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) set up a number of institutions to carry out its activities (Article 7 of the Treaty):

— a High Authority, assisted by a Consultative Committee;
— a Common Assembly;
— a Special Council of Ministers;
— a Court of Justice.

After the signing of the ECSC Treaty on 18 April 1951, the ministers needed to resolve some tricky practical questions to do with the seat of the institutions. Under the Schuman Plan, an interim committee was instructed to submit proposals concerning seats of the institutions, but it was unable to reach agreement. Some Belgians wanted the seat to be in Liège. However, there was disagreement on this issue, both in Belgium itself and in the five other Member States of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Other cities were suggested, such as Luxembourg, Strasbourg and Turin. Saarbrücken was also proposed, and yet, despite its status as a European city, it was not chosen because of the problem of the status of the Saar.

To break the deadlock in the negotiations, during the night of 24 to 25 July 1952 the Luxembourg Foreign Minister, Joseph Bech, made the proposal that the ECSC High Authority be provisionally located in Luxembourg. 'Provisional' became 'definitive', and the seat of the High Authority remained in Luxembourg until the Merger Treaty combined the executive bodies in 1965.

So, in July 1952, it was Luxembourg that was chosen, at least initially, as the home of the High Authority, along with the Special Council of Ministers and the ECSC Court of Justice, while the Common Assembly had its seat in Strasbourg, as did the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe.

The various institutions began their work in 1952. On 10 August 1952, the inaugural session of the High Authority was held in Luxembourg, although the question of the seat had not yet been finally resolved. On 8 September 1952, the first session of the Special Council of Ministers, chaired by German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, was held. Four months later, on 10 December 1952, Jean Monnet, President of the ECSC High Authority, opened the first working session of the ECSC Court of Justice.